

Half a loaf or half a car ?

At the end of its special October 24-26 sitting on the 1978 Community Budget, Parliament voted some 134 amendments to the Council of Ministers' draft. The effect is to add 618 million European Units of Account (£402.4 m), the main areas of increase being the Regional Fund, food aid, energy, research and measures to reduce unemployment.

The new Budget total is now 12,577 m EUA (£8,189 m) — more than the Council wanted, but not as much as the Commission had originally asked for. And on this point Budgets Commissioner Tugendhat came under some pressure. During committee discussions, Lord Bruce (Soc/UK) noted on Monday October 24, Commission officials had been willing to settle for less than their original programme. Would they now hold firm in discussions with the Council even on the compromise figure? "Better half a loaf than no loaf at all", replied the Commissioner.

On the following day, another Budgets Committee Member, Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK), returned to the charge. The analogy of loaves was misleading — a more exact one would be: "if you cannot have a whole motor-car, why not have a half or a quarter of one?" No, responded the Commissioner, it was more a question of cars for courses: "it is sometimes better to have a Mini than no car at all".

Basically, however, Commission and Parliament seemed in agreement: both considered the Council draft inadequate. Parliament *rappporteur* Michael Shaw (Con/UK) pointed out that when the draft was being prepared, "there was a climate of severe economic stringency in the nine member countries". But that climate has now significantly changed: the national governments themselves were now altering their policies to encourage growth and investment. "The policy of economy at all costs is not only wrong in the circumstances of this budget, but could be seriously harmful to the long-term interests of our Community."

When it came, on Wednesday October 26, to voting on the 238 amendments tabled by the various committees — Shaw's cautious expansionism proved in the majority. On all those items on which Parliament has the last word — the items of so-called "non-compulsory" expenditure — Budgets Committee or Budgets Committee endorsed amendments went through. About £88 million was added to the Regional Fund, over £44 million to employment policies, over £30 million to various social schemes (e.g. help for the handicapped), and about £18 million to energy policy. Some £123 million was voted to supply 200,000 tons of skimmed milk as food aid to developing countries.

On one matter, however, the Budgets Committee lost: expenditure on agriculture. It had been the almost unanimous opinion of Members that the proportion of the Budget devoted to this sector — 76% in the Council draft — was too



high; but unfortunately in this "compulsory" sector Parliament can only propose "modifications" over which Council has the last word. In addition, however, agricultural expenditure is in part outside the control of the Budget itself — the spring price review can mean large Supplementary Budgets, and this Budgets Committee chairman Erwin Lange, (Soc/Ger) wanted to avoid by writing in a 20% (£850m.) reserve. Parliament, however, voted for the even tougher line proposed by former Commissioner, and current Communist Member, Altiero Spinelli (It): a real ceiling on farm support spending.

The Budget, of course, still has some way to go. Parliament and Council now go into "conciliation" on these items where they disagree — meetings, effectively, of the Budgets Committee and the nine Finance Ministers. Either side could "trade" certain items for others; but the definitive Budget, and the definitive votes, will finally take place, in Strasbourg, in December.

Bad news for N. Ireland

There was bad luck for Northern Ireland as far as the European Parliament was concerned in the October 26 budget vote. Deprived of direct representation since Rafton Pounder lost his seat in the UK general election of February 1974, the province has felt itself neglected out there on the edge of the Community (despite a good share of regional aid). The sense of neglect has increased since the European Commission set up information offices in Edinburgh and Cardiff in 1975.

Rather belatedly, a petition to the Parliament from the Northern Ireland local authorities for an office in Belfast came before Parliament in early October, just before Commission President Roy Jenkins himself paid a visit to that city and

announced that an information office would indeed open up there in the course of 1978. The Conservative and Progressive Democrat Groups had put down amendments to the 1978 budget to provide funds specifically for a Belfast office. But the Commission had failed to prepare the way with the Socialists in particular and when it came to the vote, the amendments failed to get the required 100 votes, partly from apprehension about security.

Belfast, whose wish for the office as an earnest of European concern for its problems is as much psychological as material, need not despair. The conciliation procedure for finally settling the budget has a few weeks to run and the Commission believes it has adequate resources at least to permit its officials to spend more time in Northern Ireland in the New Year.

Party Conference special

At their annual Assembly in Brighton the Liberals affirmed their confidence in membership of the Federation of European Liberals and Democrats and agreed to press for proportional representation in direct elections to the European Parliament.

For some delegates, however, the Federation's draft manifesto was a "dull and turgid document" and to Michael Steed the Parliament's Liberal Group too much of a "rag bag party", with particular reservations expressed about the presence of the French Giscardiens and the Dutch VVD party. Russell Johnston, however, convinced a substantial majority of delegates that there were in fact broad common patterns within his Group, and he spoke of the openmindedness of the Group's Giscardien leader. The Dutch VVD, he reported, was even prepared to offer British Liberals one of their expected 5 seats if they failed to get representation.

The securing of proportional representation initially for direct elections and ultimately for national elections is of course a crucial issue in Liberal policy at the moment. Answering questions from the

floor Jeremy Thorpe said he would rather a nominated delegation of 81 British members attend the directly-elected parliament than witness the "mockery" produced by the first-past-the-post system. This view ran contrary to that of Jean Durieux who was in agreement with his government's view that direct elections should take place in all Member States in 1978.

"Proportional representation has no more relevance than the arrangement of deckchairs on the Titanic" was one delegate's view of the direct elections issue. However, there was substantial agreement in the House for an amendment to the Assembly's resolution of the "Lib-Lab pact", tabled by Christopher Mayhew. This declared that support for PR was a crucial indication of Labour support for the agreement.

MAN ON NEPTUNE IN THE 21st CENTURY

The Conservative Party Conference this year devoted an unusual amount of time to Europe. In addition to the 40 minute debate on Thursday afternoon, Ted Heath spoke for just over an hour and a quarter to the CPC meeting the previous evening on the theme of "Our Community".

On the other hand, it could not exactly be said that enthusiasm for Europe was at fever pitch. The Heath meeting was possibly the largest evening meeting ever held at a Conservative Conference; but this was, perhaps, more due to the singer than the song. The Thursday debate was very poorly attended, (though this may in part be due to the duplication with the previous evening and the fact that it was the final debate of the Conference).

Nevertheless, a number of interesting points emerged. Mr Heath, unfashionably, had a good word to say for the Common Agricultural Policy: "the main problem . . . is not to change the system as such but to ensure that the right prices are fixed". And besides reaffirming his belief in Proportional Representation for European elections (but not specifically the regional list system in the Bill), he went as far as he could towards asking the Shadow Cabinet to support the guillotine on the Bill.

During most of the Thursday debate, unfortunately, it did not seem that things had moved much forward from the referendum. The first speaker from the floor urged support for the Community as a mechanism for putting the first man on Neptune; and a Mr Gill summed up the general mood fairly well with the statement: "I believe we must stay in Europe because we can't come out". Only Mr Scott Hamilton of the Young European Democrats objected that the Conference was probably the last before the European elections and that they should have been debating the Party's programme.

There was almost universal support however, for holding the elections — though one or two MPs could be found clearly suffering from "Hampshire County Council" syndrome (a morbid fear of finding the House of Commons reduced to the status of the HCC, and themselves *pro rata*).

LABOUR GOES CRAB-WISE TO THE POLLS

The Labour Party will go, reluctantly to the Europolls. This can be concluded from the party's Brighton conference in early October. Enthusiasm for Europe, and for the elections, is not widespread among the parliamentary party, the "activists" (quite the contrary!) or probably the party's membership at large. But there can be no doubt that European elections will take place and the party will take part.

Formally before the conference was a document by the National Executive Committee strongly critical of the Community, while hovering in background was Mr Callaghan's letter to General Secretary Ron Hayward which sought to heal the old wounds by outlining a six-point basis for British policy in the Community: the maintenance of national governmental and parliamentary authority, democratic control over the Community (but "we do not envisage any significant increase in the powers of the European Parliament . . . (which would) require an Act of Parliament"), common policies which do not conflict with national economic, industrial or regional aims, an energy policy

compatible with national interests, and enlargement.

In a lacklustre debate the anti-marketters came out in force, but in the end conference accepted NEC recommendations to reject resolutions in favour of unilateral withdrawal from the CAP, and to remit (i.e., shelve) a call for UK parliamentary control over Community legislation. But such was the feeling of socialist brotherhood that a resolution seeking closer co-operation and a common European electoral platform with other socialist parties was rejected, notwithstanding the official call for it to be remitted.

Question Time

European Passport

The British are traditionally opposed to the concept of carrying an identity card. This is what President Simonet found during a recent visit to London; but, he admitted to Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK), these were "excuses" . . . in the guise of "reasons" for the Council not having devised a common European passport. The main problem was that of language, he reported. He told Gwyneth Dunwoody (Soc/UK) that a common passport was a tangible way of getting across the European ideal.

Tachographs

Britain, Ireland and Denmark are required to legislate on the compulsory fitting of tachographs ("the spy in the cab") to lorries by the end of this year. Neither the UK nor Ireland will meet this deadline, and Commissioner Burke told John Osborn (Con/UK) that no derogations had been or would be granted. He admitted it could become necessary to take these countries to court if they failed to comply.

Trade with Japan

Commissioner Wilhelm Haferkamp confirmed that the Community's trade deficit with Japan was likely to be \$5 billion. Trade figures should not however be the sole criterion for determining trade policy, he said. He agreed with Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) that President Jenkins could usefully make a detailed statement on the visit he is at present undertaking in Japan.

History of Europe for schools

Commissioner Haferkamp told Michele Cifarelli (Lib/It) that the Commission is endeavouring through the Kreyszig Fund, set up in 1959, to encourage various aspects of history teaching in schools including the publication of textbooks. He did not, however, feel that the production of a special comparative history of Europe would be a viable undertaking.

Vinyl chloride monomers

Protogene Veronesi (Comm/It) was not satisfied with Commissioner Henk Vredeling's assurance that the Commission was following technical progress made in the field of protection of workers against vinyl chloride monomers. The USA, he said, had since 1975 applied stringent control measures concerning levels of concentration.

Gibraltar

President Henri Simonet told Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) that the Community had no power under the Treaty to adopt a policy concerning Spain's attitude to Gibraltar and certainly not to make this an issue in accession negotiations with Spain.

Commissioner for Hackney

In the House of Commons, it is usual for Members who wish to raise constituency problems to ask the Prime Minister when he intends to visit their particular neck of the woods. To draw attention to the flight of industry from inner London, Christopher Price (Soc/UK), on behalf of Ron Brown (Soc/UK), asked Regional Commissioner Giolitti whether he was going to visit Hackney — and received a prompt acceptance of the invitation. Christopher Price then hastily slipped in a mention of "even more serious problems" in Lewisham (where his own constituency is located);

and John Evans (Soc/UK), Regional Committee chairman, added that "urban dereliction and depopulation are by no means special to London". The Commissioner clearly has a busy — and possibly rather depressing — timetable ahead.

Why the delay?

The single largest group of complaints received by the House of Commons committee on tourism, Sir Geoffrey de Freitas (Soc/UK) told Parliament on Thursday October 13, is about "bureaucratic delays at frontiers and airports". Surely, he asked, the Commission could do more to get rid of them? Commissioner Davignon had told the House that a letter had been sent to national governments at the start of the holiday season "encouraging them to simplify customs procedures"; but he in turn challenged Parliament to draw up a precise list of the useless regulations. Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) asked (though appreciating "that the answer may well be no") whether the Commission could do anything about the delays currently plaguing all the British Members, and caused by the air-traffic controllers dispute. He was right: Commissioner Davignon was not going to get mixed up in a contest between "a group of workers and their own government".

The Catalan Region

President Simonet told Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) that the Community has no policy regarding relationships with autonomous regions within Member States and therefore did not feel that the Generalitat, the Catalan autonomous government in Barcelona, would present problems if Spain joined the Community.

Save it!

"We know perfectly well that when it may be snowing in Scotland, it may be sweltering in Sicily, and that weather conditions in Copenhagen and Capri are unlikely to be the same". This was one of the objections raised by Tam Dalyell (Soc/UK) when the House came to debate a Commission proposal to save energy through harmonised regulations concerning heat generators in new buildings and a programme to modernise existing buildings. This 7-year programme could result in the modernisation of 30% and 20% of the Community's homes and office buildings respectively. Nor did he see that the 700,000 new jobs created would alleviate unemployment among the unskilled. In reply Vice-President Lorenzo Natali replied that as far as considerations of climate were concerned, each Member State would be free to determine how much insulation was necessary. On the second point Mr Natali felt that unskilled labour could indeed be absorbed into the programme.

No gold standard

The Commission is to scrap its plans to harmonise the hallmarking of articles of precious metals. This is what Commissioner Etienne Davignon told the House on Thursday October 13 after Kai Nyborg (EPD/Dk) reported that his Committee felt that standardising hallmarks would lead to too much bureaucracy and increased costs which would be passed on to the consumer. The authorisation of inferior soldering materials implied in the draft directive would for some countries mean a reduction in standards.

More on the Community pond

On the very day (Wednesday, 12 October) that the House was discussing fishing policy, Vice-President of the Commission Finn Gundelach was busy finding solutions to the problem of negotiations with third countries. Vice-President Lorenzo Natali said an agreement with Norway was imminent, discussions regarding Iceland were in preparation, and a first meeting with Canada had been held.

The House agreed on the necessity for questions of fishing policy to be treated as matters of urgency. Mark Hughes (Soc/UK) pointed out that the livelihood of some fishing communities, such as those of Hull and Grimsby, depended upon action being taken before January 1, 1978. Could the agreement with Norway not be completed before November? he asked.

John Corrie (Con/UK) made a plea for inshore fishermen. It was necessary to find other fishing grounds further afield as there was no longer room in home waters. The Commissioner, he went on, should stand by its herring ban in the North Sea, and should allow no industrial fishing at all. The Commission should also look into the

pollution and damage to boats and nets caused by oil rigs.

Mrs Winnie Ewing (Ind/UK) asked why no solution could be found for a simple matter like negotiations concerning the Barents Sea. What were we expected to do to conserve species of fish in grave danger?

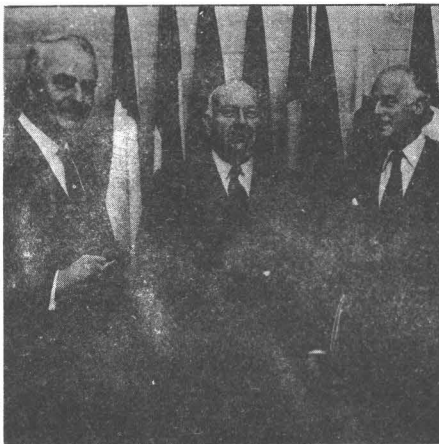
Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl) felt that more progress had been made in external fishing policy than had been made in the Community fishing sector. This was a highly emotive issue, he said.

In reply Mr Natali hoped the Commission would be able to submit proposals to the Council by October 24 but doubted that the Council would be able to reach a decision on that date.

Industry seeks party links

One important visitor to the European Parliament during the week of October 9-13 was Paul Provost, President of UNICE (the Union of the Industries of the European Community) — the joint organisation of the nine national "CBIs".

A lunch given by the Union on October 12 was attended by most of the



Tom Normanton (Con/UK), Paul Provost, Bernard Sassen.

Community's top people: President of the Parliament Emilio Colombo, President-in-Office of the Council of Ministers Henri Simonet, Commissioner Burke representing Roy Jenkins, all the leaders of Parliament's political groups, and all the chairmen of Parliament's committees.

President Provost told the guests that Community industry was now "open to closer liaison with the political groups". The coming European elections were "giving rise to associations of allied parties, and these new political formations are preparing their programmes". For this reason "we shall in the very near future be forwarding to the European political groups . . . a memorandum setting out the main lines of our positions".

Speaking both for UNICE and the European Confederation of Trade Unions, he assured his guests that industry's "Community political will" was second to none.

Problems of making 9 into 12

"A European Marshal Plan — which could not only reduce the disparities between one area and another within Europe but, ultimately, enrich us all". This is how Geoffrey Rippon (Con/UK) saw the community's function upon the accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal.

Most Members agreed that enlargement would benefit the Community by strengthening European democracy. In fact, said Michael Yeats (EPD/Irl) we cannot refuse entry to democratically-governed countries who are in a position to take on the obligations of membership; we cannot "create a rich man's club".

All agreed, however, that there would be problems; political, economic and agricultural. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Con/UK) analysed those presented by each of the three applicants. Greek industry was concentrated on the Athens area and it was true that this country had one of the fastest growth rates in Europe from 1970 to 1975. But this had been achieved by protectionist methods which would be unacceptable to the Community. Spain's agricultural structure was unco-ordinated and the poorer regions had a capital income of only 40% of that of the richer regions. Unemployment was a major problem in Portugal

and the country's GDP was barely half that of Ireland. All this would involve a rejigging of the regional policy but "problems are there to be solved if the goodwill is present", Mrs Kellett-Bowman concluded.

Council President Henri Simonet told the House that the Community must remain open to newcomers. One consequence, he felt, was that the Council should vote by majority. Commissioner Vice-President Lorenzo Natali said that enlargement would provide an opportunity to take stock of crucial issues such as economic and monetary union, and Michael Yeats agreed that enlargement would test the Community's cohesion. He warned against those who welcomed enlargement as a way of demolishing the CAP, making EMU impossible and transferring the Community into a loose free-trade area.

Uwe Jensen (EPD/DK) was pessimistic. Greece, Spain and Portugal would have to wait 10, 15 and 20 years for admission.

Unofficial Journal

It was not the best week for the English in Luxembourg when Parliament met there on October 10-14. From Monday onwards the fans started to arrive, not — thank God! — to crowd into the public gallery to hear their MEPs at work, but on to the terraces at Luxembourg's football stadium to cheer on the England team. They made the wrong choice; all accounts indicate that (as far as the match itself went) they might have got more excitement from Parliament's debate on castor-oil seed imports. Or they could have stayed at home and watched it all on the box — which is more than the Luxembourgers could do, for although the match was televised live for the benefit of British viewers it was not shown live on RTL in order not to diminish the gate at the stadium.

Subsequently, Britain's bad reputation on the Continent, as transmitted by football fans, was confirmed — though one British Member had had an uneasy feeling that things might have been a great deal worse. Outside his room at the Holiday Inn there sat, morning, noon and night, a man armed with a sub-machine gun. Was it to protect guests from the England team, also staying in the hotel? Or the team from its own fans? Or from outraged Luxembourgers? Or was it expected that Honourable Members would themselves go on the rampage?

All became clear in the end: the man with the Uzi was a guard for the delegation from the Israeli Knesset which was visiting the European Parliament.



The editors of Thomson Regional Newspapers, led by Editorial Director John Gay Davies (left foreground), held their annual conference in Luxembourg on October 12-14.

Handbag threat

But by the time Parliament reassembled in Luxembourg later in the month for the special budget sitting, the situation had got even more dramatic. Not only was the Parliament itself — and the Council of Ministers building opposite, where the Agriculture and Energy Ministers were meeting — ringed with machine-gunning gendarmerie. On Wednesday October 25 the whole of Luxembourg itself was sealed off.

Was it Baader-Meinhof? Rumour first had it that the Schleyer kidnappers had been encircled in the town. One Member drove in that morning with the disturbing news that a plan of the Parliament building had been found in a captured terrorist's handbag. (Well, at least we can use the slogan: "If it's worth blowing up, it's worth voting for"). In the end it was confirmed that a single armed Arab had been arrested at the station. Two weeks late, perhaps — though showing how right the Israelis had been to take no chances.

Bring the Jubilee

Those keeping tabs on the local papers (e.g. KPG) will have noticed that a lot of letters have been appearing in recent months attacking direct elections. In some cases unconscious telepathy seems to have been at work — people at opposite ends of the country miraculously come up with identical paragraphs. In others the arguments are splendidly idiosyncratic. KPG's favourite appeared in the *Chichester Observer* in July from a Mr J.C. Nichols. "I can only urge your readers", he wrote, "to ignore voting for the European Parliament. On the fateful day it occurs let us all fly our Jubilee flags once more in token protest against our so-called leaders, their plutocratic friends and the Communist hordes over the water."

More power to Mr Nichols's elbow! It will be a Polling Day to remember.

This Europe

"Is the Council able to state whether a military security force, acting on the instructions of the military governor of a town which is a provisional seat of the European Parliament, is entitled, in defiance of the protocol on privileges and immunities, to invent a traffic accident on the pretext of checking an official's registration on the electoral roll of the commune in which he resides, the official being alleged to have provided a satirical weekly published on Wednesdays with information on the cost of double glazing installed in the bedroom of the said military governor?" (Written Question by French Socialist Georges Carpentier to the Commission, so far unanswered).

Rippon Rover

It was at the end of last year, that rapporteur on the 1978 Budget, Michael Shaw (Con/UK), first started to investigate the Parliament's purchasing policy for its car pool. It turned out that the fleet included a number of Mercedes and BMWs, some Citroëns and a new Peugeot; but no Italian or British cars. The matter came up at the Budgets Committee, and it turned out that an essential qualification for the fleet was the ability to load into the boot at least one "cantine": the metal boxes used to shuttle documents between Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg.

Why not consider, then, the new Rover 3500, "European car of the year"? The wheels turned; and lo! this October the BMW placed at the disposal of Conservative Group Leader Geoffrey Rippon (Con/UK) has been replaced by a

new, silver Rover. A second is on order.

So British Leyland, for all its faults, has managed to get one car at least into the "European statesmen's showcase". When the next one will arrive remains to be seen. As Geoffrey Rippon himself commented: "there is an unlimited market for the best British products . . . if we will only keep the production line moving".



Keep talking

As a Parliamentary tactic, the filibuster has a more or less disreputable history. Developed by Southern orators as a legislation-blocker in the United States, its most notorious use was probably by Irish Members in the House of Commons before 1887. Hence the guillotine.

But in the European Parliament (where most speakers are limited to 5 minutes anyway) the filibuster seems wholly benign. Its employment by Michael Shaw on Wednesday October 26, indeed, seems to have saved some valuable Community research projects: noting that only 90 or so Members were present, and that at least 100 positive votes are needed to vote budget amendments, Budget rapporteur Shaw kept talking until the missing quorum had been whipped back inside.

All'ora inglese

Once upon a time the British had a reputation for precise timing (including getting to work on time?). *All'ora inglese*, the Italians called it, if they really meant to be on time. Elaine Kellett-Bowman thought the old virtues should hold still when, on October 12, the house for once ran out of questions rather than Question Time and President Colombo proceeded, fifteen minutes early, to vote on tariff quotas for Cyprus sherry, one of several votes fixed for 4.30. But stand to seek the floor as she might, Mrs Kellett-Bowman could not catch the President's eye to protest; when she did succeed she enjoyed a rare alliance with Lord Bruce and Willie Hamilton.

Then the question came: could the house reverse its own vote? *That* was a point of principle too. Finally, President Colombo adjourned the sitting to consult the Bureau. One hundred minutes later it resumed and the President declared that the vote as taken had to stand as the point of order had, for whatever reason, not been raised when the vote was taken.

K.P.G.