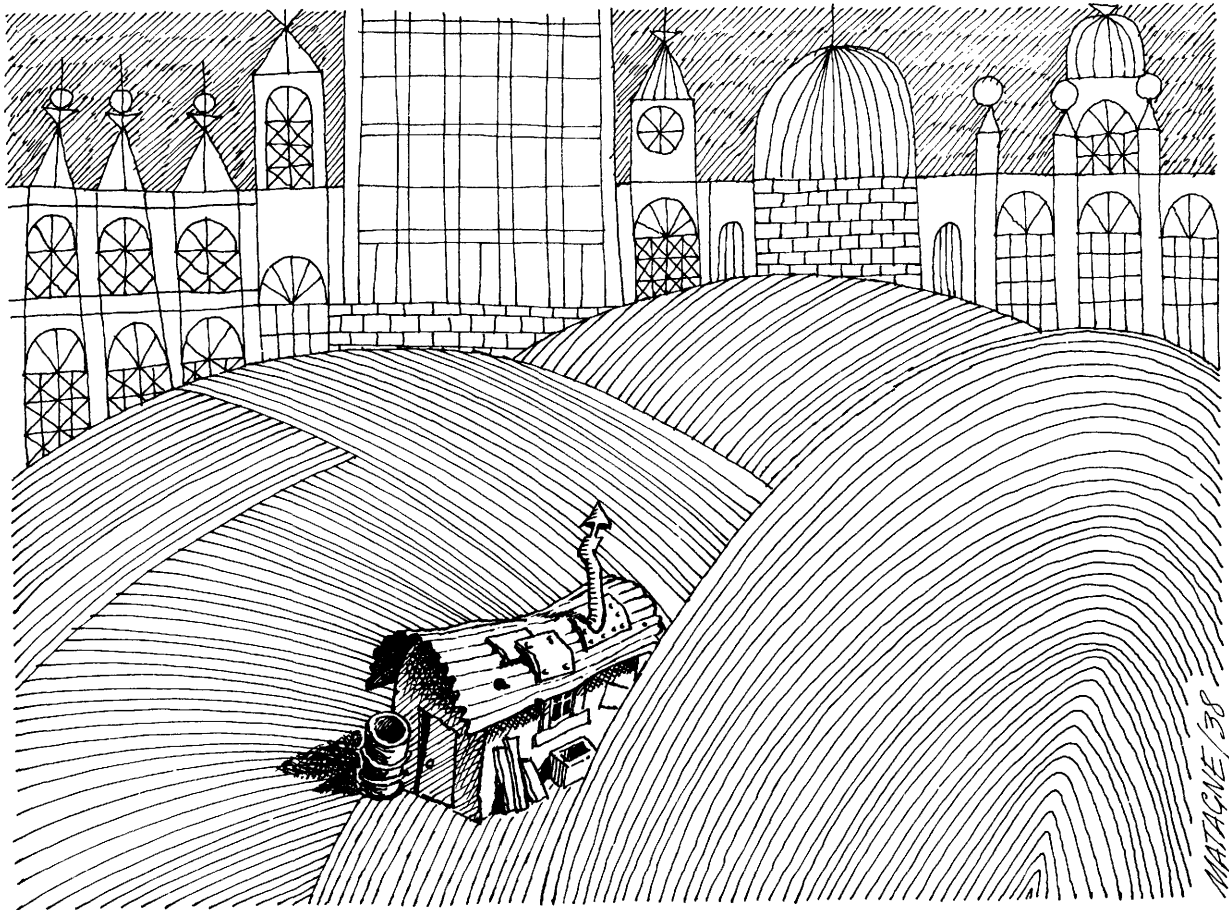


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Poverty in Europe: the forgotten millions (see page 3)

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++ POVERTY IN EUROPE : THE FORGOTTEN MILLIONS

To many people poverty is a disease or a curse : poverty is "inevitable" or, even worse, the poor "ask for it".

In ANNEX 1 Euroforum explains why and how the European Community wants to do something about Europe's ten million poor.

++ THE CONSUMER PROGRAMME ONE YEAR ON

This time last year we commented on the initial success scored by the Community's consumer protection and information programme with the establishment of closer links between the European Commission and local, national and European consumers' associations.

In ANNEX 2 Euroforum presents a second progress report on the programme.

++ EUROPE'S ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS GET TOGETHER

If all goes well, Environment Ministers from the nine Community countries will meet on 9 December to adopt the new action programme on the environment (see Euroforum No 13/76). This will press ahead with work begun under the present programme - which runs until the end of the year - and focus attention on three main objectives : clean air, clean water and less noise.

Other items which may come up for discussion at the meeting include :

- ° pest (see Euroforum No 32/76) - one of the most harmful pollutants : the European Commission has prepared a draft directive laying down biological standards which should help reduce the health hazards.
- ° drinking water and river water (see Euroforum No 19/76) - of key importance to health : our drinking water will be safer if the Ministers get around to adopting a draft directive on limit values for no less than 62 parameters ; and our river water will be purer if the European Commission's suggestion that a surveillance and monitoring network be set up meets with their approval ;
- ° titanium dioxide and paper pulp (see Euroforum No 13/76) - two major pollutants discharged in large quantities into our seas and rivers ; discussion of the European Commission's proposal to limit and monitor both types of waste could be fairly heated as Member States have yet to agree on the system to be used ;
Conventions : the Ministers could well give the go-ahead for ratification by the European Community of the Convention for the protection of the Rhine against chemical pollution and the Barcelona Convention for the protection of the Mediterranean (see Euroforum Nos 33/76 and 13/76)

++ FOR SEAFOOD ADDICTS

Those of you who are addicted to mussels, clams, scallops, oysters and periwinkles will undoubtedly welcome moves by the European Commission to harmonize quality requirements for waters in which shellfish breed.

Recent pollution incidents have made consumers a little wary of shellfish : there is no doubt that random human activity presents a serious threat to the balance of the marine environment, the problem being particularly acute in coastal waters and estuaries, their favourite breeding-grounds. To reduce the risks, the European Commission recently presented a proposal under the Community's environment programme urging that waters "favourable to the shellfish growth" - to use the official jargon - be clearly defined and samples taken at regular intervals to ensure that water quality is up to scratch. Rigid requirements relating to temperature, colour, salinity, hydrocarbon content and other relevant factors are clearly spelled out.

Readers may have heard of Vatel, the famous cook, who committed suicide because the fish he had ordered for a banquet did not arrive in time. It is a relief to know that his modern counterparts will not be driven to the same length by oil flavoured seafood.

++ A LESSON LEARNED

In reply to a question from Mr. Cousté, a member of the European Parliament, Mr. Scarascia Mugnozza, Vice-President of the European Commission with special responsibility for consumer affairs, said that the European Commission would draw on the results of the survey carried out at its request in the nine Community countries in implementing a concerted policy on consumer information and education.

European consumers seem to feel that the media do not devote enough space to consumer topics. The very fact that the Commission's survey has shown that there is a "demand" for this type of information should encourage editors and producers to expand their coverage.

The European Commission itself plans to step up exchanges of information and experience by organizing regular meetings of press, radio and television journalists specializing in consumer affairs in the Community. This, it feels, could make a substantial contribution towards improving the quality of information supplied.

The European Commission also intends to encourage public discussion by organizing symposia itself, or supporting symposia organized by others, on consumer protection.

In its view the favourable reception given to the first ever consumer survey by the organizations directly concerned, by the press and by national experts is a strong argument in favour of regular monitoring of public attitudes to action in defence of the consumer.

++ YOUNG PEOPLE OUT OF WORK

Unemployment among young people is still giving cause for concern in the European Community. The latest figures available for the countries that produce detailed statistics show little sign of improvement. In Belgium for instance the number of under 25s out of work increased from 69,000 in June 1976 to 71,000 in September 1976. The figure for Germany went from 77,000 to 96,000 and the figure in France from 313,000 to 432,000; over the same period. Between May and August 1976 youth unemployment in the Netherlands increased from 68,000 to 94,000, while it more than doubled - 181,000 to 377,000 - in the United Kingdom.

++ CHATEAU HASTINGS ?

One of the events of the autumn season in London is the race to be first with the new Beaujolais : it is in fact being drunk there hours after its "release". It's not with any idea of competing that British growers tend their 100 hectares (247 acres) of vines so lovingly : there were vines in the British Isles when William the Conqueror arrived in Hastings and "Welsh champagne" could still be found near Cardiff in the nineteenth century.

But British wine has a long way to go before it presents a threat to other Community wines. A look at the figures will give readers an idea of the relative importance of British vineyards : in 1973/74 Belgium had 7 hectares under vines, Luxembourg 1 228, Germany 95 600, Italy 1 155 000 and France 1 283 000.

++ BLUE PLAN FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

Fifteen French and ten Italian laboratories are cooperating in the United Nations Environment Programme's Blue Plan for monitoring pollution in the Mediterranean.

The European Commission is associated with this venture as an observer and will be attending two important intergovernmental meetings in the Spring. The first to be held at Split from 31 January to 4 February 1977, will adopt the Blue Plan ; the second, to be held in Athens from 7 to 12 February, will discuss pollution of the Mediterranean from land-based sources.

While we are on the subject we would remind readers that the European Community, France, Italy and eleven other countries, signed a Convention on the Protection of the Mediterranean against Pollution on 13 September 1976.

++ BRAINS NOT BRAWN

"You need your wits about you when you're driving a lorry". This laconic remark from an experienced long-distance driver is only too true. Insurance companies' statistics unfortunately show that it can be dangerous to put a young, inexperienced driver behind the wheel of an articulated truck. This is why the European Community is planning to take precautionary measures to ensure that under 21s are not allowed to drive heavy vehicles (7.5 tonnes or more) until they can show that they are up to it.

The Community's Transport Ministers recently agreed in principle to a proposal for a directive prepared by the European Commission which will make it compulsory for national authorities to issue certificates to the effect that young drivers know how their vehicles are built, how they work and how to look after them ; can locate and repair minor faults ; know how to drive them economically and efficiently, and are capable of reading a road map, an insurance policy and the various transport documents drivers need to carry.

Aspiring lorry drivers will also have to supply proof of driving experience.

++ 500 STUDIES A YEAR

Between 500 and 600 studies are produced for the European Commission each year by specialized firms, experts and institutions. In 1975 expenditure from the studies, surveys and consultations appropriation in the Commission's budget came to 10 292 923.18 units of account (1 uc = approx US \$ 1.1).

++ MINING ACCIDENTS

The European Community grants aid on a systematic basis to the families of men killed in mining accidents. Over the last five years no less than 13 disasters have meant the loss of 126 lives. The victims' families received a total of 8 163 472 Bfrs.

At present dependants of a single person receive Bfrs. 30 000. Widows receive Bfrs 50 000 and each orphan Bfrs 20 000. In addition the Paul Finet Foundation lends a helping hand by providing scholarships for the children of coal and steel workers who have died following an accident.

++ DATA PROCESSING : COMMUNITY MARKET TO DOUBLE IN FIVE YEARS

By 1980 data processing, advanced electronic components and telecommunications will account for more than 6 % of the Europe's gross national product. This is why the European Commission is taking a special interest in the development of the computer and allied industries. One of the points stressed in the four year development programme for data processing presented by the European Commission to the Community's Council of Ministers is the importance of peripheral equipment (mini-computers, remote peripherals ...) and electronic components for computer applications (notably integrated circuits).

The European Community's electronic components industry will soon be faced with tough competition not only from the United States but also from Japan, where the government recently launched a \$ 200 million programme to manufacture a series of computers based on VLSI (Very Large Scale Integration) technology. The European Commission has no concrete proposals to put forward for the time being, but it hopes to alert the Community's Council of Ministers and the general public to the need for a political decision involving financial support if the European Community is to devise a consistent programme to meet the challenge of world-wide competition.

WORLD DATA-PROCESSING MARKET IN 1973

(total expenditure of users)

	<u>World</u>	<u>United States</u>	<u>Western Europe</u>	<u>Japan</u>	<u>Eastern Europe</u>	<u>Rest of World</u>
\$ '000 m	57.2	31.5	15.1	4.4	2.15	4.05
%	100	55	26.4	7.7	3.8	7.1

Source : Euroeconomics, quoted by OI-Informatique Management, July - August 1974

++ TOWARDS PURER ANTIOXIDANTS

As far back as 1970 the Community published a list of antioxidants which could be used in foodstuffs. The European Commission has now gone a step further as part of its campaign to protect consumer health. If its recent proposal to the Community's Council of Ministers is approved, substances on the 1970 list will have to comply with specific criteria of purity if they are to remain in use.

POVERTY IN EUROPE : THE FORGOTTEN MILLIONS

To many people poverty is a disease or a curse : poverty is inevitable, or, even worse, the poor "ask for it"! It's so easy to blame fate when others are involved ! But there are about ten million "others" in Europe roughly the population of Belgium. If the word "Community" is to mean anything their situation must be looked into and improved.

Facing up to the problems

Perhaps the most commendable aspect of the European Commission's anti-poverty programme is that it spotlights a problem that the authorities and the general public tend to avoid. How many people know that the whole approach to poverty has changed radically over the last twenty years ?

We have come a long way since the days when Abbé Pierre took part in a French radio quiz to win money to care for his charges. His successor in the Noisy-le-Grand shantytown near Paris, Father Joseph Wrezinsky, soon realised that charity could only do so much. He came to the conclusion that poverty cannot be tackled on a day-to-day basis; society must get to grips with it to understand the whys and wherefores ; above all, it must help people to help themselves. Others have come to the same conclusion in recent years : our "industrial" society, our "affluent" society must do more than pass the hat around occasionally.

Three types of scheme

This new approach dominates the European Commission's anti-poverty programme, which includes 21 pilot schemes and two cross-national studies. Although the schemes are very varied, they fall into three main categories.

The first concentrates on children and aims to break the vicious circle of poverty before it takes a hold. For instance one scheme covers three groups of families in France (at Noisy-le Grand, Toulon and Herblay) and aims to encourage families to cooperate with each other and organize themselves in the interests of their children : in other words to encourage the most deprived families to give their children the same chance to develop physically, culturally and spiritually as children from privileged backgrounds.

Similar schemes in the United Kingdom are designed to help interested mothers in vocational training by setting up child centres which the mothers themselves help to run. Family day centres have been established in London to give mothers who do not go out to work an opportunity of meeting to discuss their problems and ways of overcoming them.

The second group of schemes sets out to improve and reorganize administrative services for the poor. In Italy for example, a scheme in Padua is attempting to help the very poor, not by creating a "special" administration but by using social and medical services already available locally.

A Danish scheme is aimed at the homeless who have somehow or other slipped through the social security net. A small residential centre is being set up, where social workers will live with the homeless for some time and help them work out answers to their problems. The third group of projects is more directly concerned with what might be termed community development. A comprehensive scheme in Scotland involves the modernization of slums in the suburbs of Edinburgh ; jobs are to be created and a social advice bureau opened.

At Breda, in the Netherlands, an effort is being made to encourage the most deprived families to take an active part, as a group, in the social and cultural life of the town and bring the group to a point where it can decide on its own future. The aim is to prove that the vicious circle of poverty can be broken.

In Germany a group of projects is investigating new and more effective ways of integrating the homeless into society.

Finally in Belgium, a scheme underway in Brussels is trying to give the people of a traditionally poor area a new collective awareness and encourage them to help themselves.

The way in which the 21 pilot schemes were selected is of interest in that it shows the European Commission is concerned to get off the beaten track in a field where everything seems to have been tried before. In agreement with national experts and specialist organizations, the European Commission has given preference to schemes in which the poor themselves are directly involved and schemes which if successful, could be applied to similar situations elsewhere in the European Community.

Two studies

Who are these men, women and children whose very existence questions the foundations of our society ? Why do they fall through the social security net ?

Two cross-national studies financed by the European Commission should provide some of the answers. The first will concentrate on the material side of poverty, processing replies by five hundred poor families in London, Paris and Köln to questions on income, housing and work ; it will go on from there to assess the relative effectiveness of social services designed to assist them. The second will survey the public attitudes to poverty in all Community countries.

Behind the words

Behind the studies and the definitions these schemes reach out to men and women who have long been outcasts, excluded from taking an active part in society.

We must go to them in their "homes", places where no one wants to live, where no one should be expected to live : makeshift accommodation, ramshackle shelters, derelict buildings, old lorries, shanty towns ... We must spend time with these people worn out by anxiety, sickness and hardship and learn to appreciate the situation of families living in constant fear of separation because they have never known anything but poverty. Families living in insanitary, crowded conditions ; men who can't hold down a job because they have never received any training ; children who are doomed to the same sort of life from the cradle ; all of these factors help to perpetuate an unacceptable situation. Yet it is shared by ten million Europeans. This is what is at stake in the anti-poverty programme : ten million people whose views are never heard but must somehow be represented in the Europe we are trying to build.

THE CONSUMER PROGRAMME ONE YEAR ON

In April 1975 we told you that the European consumer had "come of age" with the adoption by the Community's Council of Ministers of a comprehensive and ambitious consumer protection and information programme (see I&S No 15/75). This time last year we commented on the initial success scored by the programme with the establishment of closer links between the European Commission and local, national and European consumers' associations (see I & S No 39/75).

The European Commission has been busy in the interval ; a number of proposals are awaiting Council approval ; others are still being worked on. Although the programme runs until 1979 it is already well underway and building up a momentum that should ensure that the consumer's interests will still be a Community priority after 1979.

In the next few pages Euroforum reports on progress towards a consumer's bill of rights since the last review.

1. The right to protection of health and safety

With modern technology producing such an array of advanced and complex products, the consumer is extremely vulnerable. He can often tell when he has been overcharged for a product but is rarely aware of the product's long-term effects on his health.

For this reason the European Commission has been devoting particular attention to colouring matters and ingredients used in foodstuffs, the constituents of cosmetics, dangerous substances and preparations, and plastics. Labelling and presentation of foodstuffs have also been singled out for extensive Community action, not only to protect consumers but also to facilitate intra-Community trade.

In July of this year the Community's Council of Ministers adopted directives on cosmetics, and on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations, in yet another move to eliminate technical barriers to trade. The directives will ensure that the same safety standards apply throughout the Community. The cosmetics directive contains a "positive" list of permitted ingredients and a "negative" list of banned ones.

Under the new labelling requirements cosmetics manufacturers must indicate ingredients and give a "use by" date.

Similarly the European Commission has prepared a list of dangerous substances and preparations, including PCBs, which can only be marketed or used subject to specific conditions. These lists are kept up -to-date with the help of a number of scientific committees which keep all new substances under constant surveillance.

The rapid growth in the number of synthetic chemical compounds is making monitoring more and more difficult. This is why European Commission has proposed to the Council of Ministers that systematic controls be introduced. Before any new substance is placed on the market, the manufacturer would have to check that it is completely safe. The competent national authorities would have to be notified and given sufficient information to decide whether the product should be banned or not.

The Scientific Committee on Foodstuffs has been keeping a close watch on colouring matters used in food. Reports from the United States questioning the safety of one such substance - amaranth - prompted the Committee to undertake its own investigation. The results were inconclusive, so the Committee has provisionally authorized its use until the end of 1978. Nine other substances were, however, banned by the Council of Ministers following detailed examination.

Materials coming into contact with food have also been given special attention, and the Council of Ministers is currently examining an outline directive on safety aspects.

Following a report by the Scientific Committee on Foodstuffs drawing attention to the cancer risk presented by traces of vinyl chloride monomer in PVC, the European Commission has been drawing up proposals to protect the consumer by ensuring that no VCM traces in PVC containers are transferred to food. The possible link between heart trouble and erucic acid, found in rapeseed oil, led the Council of Ministers to adopt a directive limiting its use in foodstuffs to a maximum of 10 %.

There is even a risk involved in cooking food : the European Commission has sent the Council of Ministers proposals on minimum safety standards for gas cookers marketed in the Community.

Knowing the exact ingredients of a product also helps the consumer to choose between alternatives. To prevent him being misled in any way, the European Commission has drafted a directive on the labelling and presentation of foodstuffs. The proposal, which is being examined by the Council of Ministers at present, lays down rules for labelling both prepacked and non-prepacked food. Once this is adopted labelling which misleads the consumer as to the contents or properties of foodstuffs will be outlawed. Information on the label will include a list of ingredients, a "sell-by" date, conditions of use and/or instructions for use couched in terms which everyone can understand.

When is French mustard not French mustard ? When it is made in the United Kingdom perhaps ? What a particular food is made of is important when it is sold in other countries : there are differences of opinion, for instance, on the best recipe for mayonnaise. Consequently the European Commission has had to get the Nine to specify approved ingredients to facilitate intra-Community trade and avoid misleading consumers. Other foodstuffs being studied in depth by the European Commission at the moment include mustard, beer, tomato concentrates and fine pastry products. Directives spelling out the ingredients to be used in fruit juices and condensed milk have already been adopted by the Council of Ministers.

Additives in animal feed, combined with the use of fertilizers on fodder crops, represent a health hazard when animals end up on the consumer's table. To minimize the dangers the European Commission has set up a Standing Committee for Feedingsuffs which reviews and tests additives used in animal feed and updates existing directives at regular intervals.

2. The right to protection of economic interests

Key issues in this section of the consumer programme are product liability and consumer credit.

Considerable progress has already been made on product liability. In July the European Commission presented a proposal to the Council of Ministers aimed at harmonizing national laws which differ enormously on this point.

Dealing with a product that is defective has always been a difficult, time-consuming and expensive business, even for the most resilient consumer. Proving that the manufacturer is at fault is a complex matter. The new proposal marks the transition from the traditional principle of fault to the principle of "liability irrespective of a fault" - a considerable innovation for all Community countries.

Under the directive the manufacturer would be liable even if, in the light of the scientific and technical data available at the time the article was put on the market, nobody could have known of the defect. It would be for the manufacturer to prove his innocence, not for the consumer to identify the guilty party, in the production chain. Liability has been limited to ten years and for insurance purposes, to 25 million EUA for personal injuries, 15 000 EUA per person for damage to movable property and 50 000 EUA per person for damage to immovable property.

The European Commission is continuing to work on a proposal for a directive on consumer credit in general and hire purchase in particular. The aim is to do away with the small print, making all such transactions open and above board so that the consumer is fully aware of how much he will have to pay and of all the conditions attached.

Progress has also been made on a proposal for a directive on misleading advertising. A lot of the work in this area is highly technical - it may even appear irrelevant to the consumer - yet it is often the very area in which protection is badly needed.

In January the Community's Council of Ministers adopted directives on the accuracy of water and electricity meters and another on the weight and volume of prepacked goods. From now on producers will have to see to it that at least the average weight of goods coming off the assembly line corresponds to the labelled weight - and inspectors will be there to check.

Meanwhile, Commission experts have been working on proposals which would make it compulsory for both the unit price - for example FF 100 per kilo - and the actual selling price to be clearly marked on prepacked articles. In this way the producer is less likely to get away with overcharging - asking FF 55 for a 450 g packet.

A proposal on precious metals and assay standards and another on taxi meters and the like are under consideration by the Council of Ministers.

Other areas being investigated are door-to-door selling and correspondence courses. The European Commission considers that consumers have a legal right to know exactly what they are getting so that they cannot be cajoled into buying something they do not really want.

Surveys conducted by European consumers' associations for the European Commission point to future areas of activity : they deal with unfair clauses in contracts and after-sales service and repairs.

3. The right to advice, help and redress

Priorities have still to be identified in this relatively unexplored field but work is continuing in the light of material produced by the symposium held in Montoellier in December 1975 on legal procedures, small claims courts and arbitration.

4. The right to information and education

In October and November of last year the European Commission conducted an opinion poll to find out what and how the Community's consumers think ; 9 500 people were asked for their views on subjects ranging from advertising to consumer representation.

The European Commission also subsidized surveys by recognized consumers' associations on consumer education in the schools and consumer participation in public transport.

The European Commission is preparing three information booklets for publication early next year. The first will discuss the influence of consumers' associations on public

authorities, the second will be a survey of consumer opinion and the third a bibliography on consumer protection. Finally, we would mention Euroforum's information effort.

5. The right to consultation and representation

The Consumers' Consultative Committee has been consulted by the European Commission on all the major directives relating to consumer protection, and its advice has proved invaluable.

The officers of the Committee have had a number of meetings with the member of the Commission with special responsibility for agricultural policy to discuss farm prices for the forthcoming marketing year.