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Europe's consumers take the floor (see page 3)

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++ EUROPE'S CONSUMERS TAKE THE FLOOR

A symposium for consumer associations will be held in Brussels on 2 and 3 December 1976 under the auspices of the European Commission. In ANNEX 1 Euroforum previews the papers to be read by consumers' representatives.

++ NOT BY BREAD ALONE

The situation of the arts in Europe does not stand up to close scrutiny a lot remains to be done before the European Community can claim to be anywhere near a policy measuring up to past glories. In ANNEX 2 Euroforum outlines some of the steps which should be taken without delay.

++ THE COMMUNITY ECONOMY : HESITANT RECOVERY

Industrial production which had declined in the early summer staged a modest recovery in August, and the improvement seems to have been maintained in September. This was primarily due to increased production of basic materials and intermediate goods, notably in the chemical industry. The trend remained uncertain in the consumer goods industries despite the favourable movement in demand for motor cars ; this may be attributable, in part at least, to the fact that households have been tending to spend more on services.

The situation on the labour market was still depressed at the end of the summer. Seasonal factors apart, job vacancies have failed to show any real improvement in most Community countries and have actually deteriorated in some.

The differences between inflation rates in the nine countries became more marked in the early autumn. Consumer prices were very stable in Germany and in Luxembourg in September but elsewhere the upward price movement remained vigorous or even gathered momentum.

The Community's trade deficit continued to worsen during the third quarter of the year. Exports to non-member countries, which had risen only modestly during the first half of the year, slowed even further during the summer months. As this trend seems to have been influenced recently not only by the weakening in world demand, but also by a deterioration of the competitive position of some sectors of Community industry.

Trade between member countries, which had contributed to the revival of foreign trade earlier in the year, rose much more slowly during the summer months. The slow-down is closely linked with the general weakening in the uptrend in economic activity exhibited throughout the Community in recent months.

++ PARLIAMENT DISCUSSES CONSUMER INFORMATION

During a lively debate at a recent meeting of the European Parliament the European Commission told the House that it had been building up contacts with journalists specializing in consumer affairs over the last three years. Regular meetings were organized to enable them to swap information and experience and the European Commission felt that this was helping to improve the supply of information to consumers. It intended to develop public debate by holding consumer protection seminars itself or backing seminars organized by others. The Montpellier colloquium on judicial and para-judicial procedures for the protection of consumers - with which Parliament had been associated - was a good example of what it had in mind.

Euroforum got a mention too : it seems that our articles are widely reprinted in the press and regular readers will know that many of them deal with consumer protection.

The European Commission also was paying attention to consumer information in the legal sense : areas in which it is or has been active include labelling, presentation and advertising of foodstuffs ; indication of unit prices on certain foodstuffs ; and misleading and dishonest advertising.

A symposium for consumer associations would be held in Brussels in December and before the year is out the European Commission would be publishing an information booklet on consumer organizations and a bibliography on consumer protection.

++ EUROPE AT WORK

- ° Despite the serious unemployment problem, the idea of part-time work is slow to win acceptance in Community countries. Exceptions to the general rule are Denmark and the United Kingdom where 17 % and 16.9 % of the work force - and 40.3 % and 40.9 % of female workers - are employed part-time. This work pattern only applies to 9 % of workers in Germany, 6.6 % in France, 5.6 % in the Netherlands, 4.6 % in Italy, 4.1 % in Belgium and 4 % in Ireland, the European average being 9.4 %.
- ° The age at which people begin their working lives varies too. In Ireland and Luxembourg they start young; 10.9 % and 8.2 % of workers are under 20. The French and Danish percentages are only half that.
- ° Employers and the self-employed in the Community contend that they work an average of twelve hours a week more than wage- and salary-earners. The Community record is held by British farmers who work a 69.4 hour week. At the other extreme, wage- and salary-earners in service industries in the United Kingdom claim that they only work 36.3 hours a week, making them the most leisured of all Community workers.

++ EUROPHARMACEUTICALS ?

"Europharmaceuticals" may be on the way. Two Community directives, one harmonizing application procedures for authorization to place proprietary medicinal products on the market, the other abolishing frontier checks, came into force on 20 December. It was no easy task in this area to reconcile free movement of goods with better public health protection. Although a single Community authorization has still to be introduced, the directives do represent positive attempt to bridge the gap between the stringent controls operated in some countries and the more flexible ones applied in others.

++ FARM FUND : WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO ?

Currency fluctuations and higher farm prices are to blame for record expenditure by the EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund), the mainstay of Europe's farm policy. In 1975 total expenditure came to 4 727 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx US \$ 1.1), way above the 4 312 million u.a. appropriation initially approved.

There were three spectacular increases :

- ° aid for agricultural imports into the three new member countries amounted to 415 000 000 u.a. or 166 000 000 more than planned ;
- ° import subsidies for sugar to guarantee Europe a stable supply when world prices were spiralling upwards represented an additional 177 000 000 u.a. ;
- ° massive intervention buying of beef to cushion farmers against tumbling prices cost 980 000 000 u.a. , or double the figure originally planned.

But there were some pleasant surprises too. Although the milk powder mountain grew in 1975 EAGGF expenditure was not affected. And the collapse of the butter mountain meant a saving of 403 000 000 u.a. Milk and milk products still account for 24 % of EAGGF expenditure followed - this is new - by beef (21 %) and cereals (12 %)

++ HUNT FOR A KILLER

With the Seveso disaster an extremely toxic gas - dioxin or TCDD - hit the headlines for the first time. Considerable efforts are now being made within the European Community to track down this gas to protect the general public and the environment.

Dioxin is, for instance given off by weedkillers based on 2,4,5 T. This product, banned in Italy since 1970, is still in use in other Community countries, though a temporary ban is now being considered in France.

The only regulations in the matter in the nine Community countries limit the dioxin content of 2,4,5 T weedkillers to 0.1 ppm. The European Commission feels that this is inadequate and is looking into ways and means of tightening up Community rules and regulations on the manufacture of toxic chemical substances. And a survey is to be conducted to locate concerns manufacturing chemicals likely to contain dioxin.

++ DEVELOPMENT AID : WAY OFF TARGET

In 1970, at the beginning of the second development decade, the industrialized countries agreed that they would aim to spend 0.7 % of their gross national product on development aid.

Six years later they are still short of this target. In fact the European Community with 0.45 % is well up the table for countries which are of OECD's Development Aid Committee. The breakdown is as follows :

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Belgium | 0.59 % |
| Denmark | 0.57 % |
| France | 0.62 % |
| Germany | 0.39 % |
| United Kingdom | 0.39 % |

Italy did not subscribe to the relevant Recommendation and Ireland is not a member of the Development Aid Committee.

In the European Commission's view the 0.7 % target will remain out of reach until such time as aid policies are harmonized. Unfortunately a resolution to this effect adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers in July 1974 has remained a dead letter.

++ A DANGEROUS HOBBY

All too often a Saturday afternoon spent mowing the lawn leaves the amateur gardener minus a finger or a toe. The clumsy have even been known to electrocute themselves by cutting through the lead of their power mowers.

This is why the European Commission is working on a proposal for a directive designed to harmonize safety standards and eliminate obstacles to intra-Community trade. At present it is examining national safety standards for lawnmowers pending the outcome of work being done by the International Standards Organization in this area. It hopes that the ISO's world-wide standards can serve as a basis for Community legislation.

++ ASBESTOS UNDER FIRE

War has been declared on asbestos, widely used to good effect to insulate buildings and domestic appliances. It appears that asbestos - which is also used in wine filters - is extremely dangerous to health because its fibres lodge in lung tissue.

Since this discovery is relatively recent the exact extent of the danger is difficult to determine and, needless to say, consumers and manufacturers view the problem quite differently.

A panel of experts, which looked into the matter on behalf of the European Commission, has come to the conclusion that asbestos dust presents the main danger. For this reason it urges strict precautions to be taken during processing, transport and sale of asbestos. It also recommends that the general public be alerted to the dangers of exposure - handling insulation material, replacing brake linings, working on certain fibrous concretes and so on.

The European Commission has decided to press ahead with its enquiries to find out more about the health hazards of asbestos.

++ JAPANESE DUMPING

The Community's ballbearing industry is not running smoothly. In three countries - France, Germany and the United Kingdom - the industry has had to cut its work force by 5 000 since 1974. Short-time working is the order of the day.

A principal cause is a Japanese invasion of the European market : Italy has escaped, by imposing import quotas. According to the European Association of Ballbearing Manufacturers, the Japanese offensive is based on dumping : it claims that Japanese ballbearings are 25 % to 50 % cheaper in Europe than in Japan. The European Commission has found the problem serious enough to initiate an anti-dumping procedure against the Japanese manufacturers.

++ DRINKING PATTERNS

Traditions die hard : the French still hold the European (and world) drinking record and the Germans are still top of the beer league.

But drinking patterns are changing. The French, for instance, are drinking less and less wine (there has been a steady fall since 1955) ; in 1975 they got through 103.7 litres a head, while the Italians managed 107.5. But they still drank ten times more than the Danes (11.48 litres) and twenty times more than the British (5.21 litres) who, with the Irish (3.5 litres), have yet to develop a taste for wine.

It is interesting to note, by the way, that wine consumption in Denmark has increased by more than 50 % since it joined the European Community.

Beer is held in high esteem throughout the Community. Consumption is rising everywhere except in Belgium : there it has been falling since 1973, after twenty years of steady increase.

How much they drink (in litres per head)

| | <u>(Pure alcohol drinks)</u> | <u>Wine</u> | <u>Beer</u> |
|----------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| France | 17 | 103.7 | 45.22 |
| Italy | 13.4 | 107.5 | 12.7 |
| Germany | 12.5 | 23.2 | 147.8 |
| Luxembourg | 12.3 | 41.3 | 129.0 |
| Belgium | 10.1 | 17.2 | 140.0 |
| Denmark | 8.9 | 11.48 | 117.2 |
| Netherlands | 8.6 | 10.25 | 78.9 |
| United Kingdom | 8.1 | 5.21 | 117.6 |
| Ireland | 6.7 | 3.5 | 84.37 |

Source : Produktschap voor Gedistilleerde Dranken
Westmolenstraat 2, Schiedam - Nederland.

++ VC AND PVC

PVC stands for polyvinyl chloride, one of the best known plastics used in every home every day. PVC can contain quantities of vinyl chloride (VC), a highly dangerous product in that it causes cancer. Unfortunately, as with many chemical compounds, little is known as yet about the full effects of vinyl chloride. Until such time as research produces further information its use as a propellant in aerosols has been banned by a directive introducing general restrictions on the marketing of dangerous substances adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers on 27 July 1976.

Experts have also recommended that everything possible be done to reduce not only exposure to vinyl chloride but also the level of vinyl chloride in PVC so that no traces will migrate into food or drinking water.

The European Commission recently supplemented these wise precautions with a proposal for a directive which would standardize measures to protect the health of those who are exposed to vinyl chloride in their day-to-day work.

++ TOXICOLOGY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

An international scientific symposium on the " Evaluation of Toxicological Data for Protection of Public Health and the Environment" is to be held in Luxembourg on 7 and 8 December. The aim of the two-day meeting, which is being organized jointly by the European Commission and the International Academy of Environmental Safety, is to take a critical look at the different toxicological tests currently in use and review the methods and general procedures employed in the toxicological evaluation of chemicals in the context of public health protection.

Further information and registration forms can be obtained from the European Commission Directorate for Health and Safety , Bâtiment Jean Monnet, avenue Alcide de Gasperi, Kirchberg-Luxembourg.

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EUROPE'S CONSUMERS TAKE THE FLOOR

They say that two heads are better than one. If this is true we can expect great things of the 180 delegates to the symposium for consumer associations to be held in Brussels on 2 and 3 December 1976 under the auspices of the European Commission.

This major gathering will review the Community's record so far and give consumers an opportunity of saying what they think it should do in the years ahead.

Useful contacts should also be established between consumer representatives and the authorities : civil servants will no longer be anonymous cogs in a mysterious administrative machine but attentive listeners eager - they are consumers too - to implement a realistic consumer policy.

Work on health and safety, legal and economic interests, information and education, and representation will be dealt with in four reports drawn up by representatives of the organizations involved in consumer affairs : consumer organizations, family associations, cooperatives and trade unions.

A preview of some significant extracts from these reports is given below.

The Promotion of Consumer Interests (Mr. de Grave)

In his report Mr de Grave suggests that consumer associations should call on the Commission to drop the idea of "protecting consumers" in favour of "promoting consumers' interests " ; active promotion of quality goods should replace the banning of harmful products.

What, Mr de Grave asks, do we want to consume in the year 2000 ? Do we intend to leave our destinies in the hands of the multinationals or entrust them to the blind forces of liberalism and competition ? In such a society consumers constitute an enslaved sub-caste.

More privileges are attached to possessions than to existence. Individual consumption and maximum consumption are presented as they keys to happiness by an aggressive, highly-organized mass production system which cultivates individualism and frustration, phenomena which may assume dramatic proportions as the underprivileged are encouraged to imitate the consumption patterns of the affluent.

This may reach such a pitch that satisfying essential needs will take second place to satisfying needs that appear less urgent at first sight. What sacrifices will people make to follow the latest fashion, to own a car or a television set ?

Consumption is a collective phenomenon ; there is no individual solution. Advertisers realized long ago that a product does not necessarily satisfy a need, that it is above all the key to a certain life-style.

If consumers are to fight against permanent frustration, they must free themselves of the alienating constraints of society. If they unite, they should be able to set out their criteria and objectives. It is a matter of creating an economy based on the utilization of goods, not on their exchange value.

For the consumer, economic development and knowledge of what will be produced are factors which must outweigh all other considerations. Medium-term economic policy, much neglected today and never given adequate consideration in the past, should not merely be reactivated, but should place far more emphasis on the consumer in the context of private and collective consumption (a concept to which the Commission has given too little thought). It should be accompanied by specific measures aimed at ensuring that these objectives are pursued.

Consumer Health and Safety (Mr Bouis)

Protecting health and safety is tantamount to implementing a genuine policy of quality. What directly interests the consumer is the final product and what he wants is a quality product suited to his needs and tastes and conducive to his health and safety. This means that the consumer has an increasingly sustained interest in the various links of the manufacturing - marketing - consumption chain.

Producers, manufacturers and distributors must do their best to satisfy consumer requirements ; the consumer in turn must endorse, by his purchases, the products most likely to give satisfaction.

The consumer can exercise this responsibility only if he has a clear idea of what is available on the market, and this means genuine information about the product itself and consumer education on aspects essential to objective buying. This is important, for consumers who exercise their freedom of choice and make their purchases consciously influence competition and, in the long run, the development of product quality and the protection of health and safety.

The consumer has a legitimate right to view and monitor the whole production process, for he is the final user and its *raison d'être*. It goes without saying that, in our form of democratic society, this right should be exercised by officially-recognized organizations. It should be emphasized in this context that a policy of coordination should be launched so that the various groups involved - consumers, industrialists, farmers, research workers - can cooperate in establishing criteria for this monitoring operation.

Consumer Information and Education (Mr Semler-Collery)

Generally speaking business circles and authorities in Community countries are - in varying degrees - required to provide information. This obligation, often ill-defined by law but taking shape as precedents are set, applies before a contract is concluded (labelling, instructions ...) and in the contract itself (more comprehensive information). There have been few comparative studies in this area so far and the Community could well encourage such surveys, making them a regular feature and publishing findings.

The information required by law is incomplete and the obligation to provide it is often ignored (business secrets, exemptions, inadequate checks, problems of seeking legal redress, often a slow and costly process).

At Community level, directives are often lax about deadlines, checks and penalties. It would seem particularly appropriate for the Community to take steps to make some of its activities more credible to consumers and to encourage Member States to enforce decisions more stringently.

The compulsory provision of information should be supplemented by information supplied under codes of conduct voluntarily assumed or negotiated with consumer representatives. In the private sector, the Community should actively encourage the use of standard contracts, a practice which is already taking hold in some countries.

It is obvious that, to be good, information must be set out in clear, comprehensible terms. Mr. Semler-Collery notes in this connection that Community directives are not always models of clear drafting.

Assuming that adequate consumer education is provided in schools is this enough to enable the young consumer to buy knowledgeably when he reaches adulthood, keeping in mind the speed of technological advances and changes in the social and economic facts of life which are challenging our knowledge and consumer models. Can we neglect the major problems encountered by the elderly, by migrant workers, by the least privileged in general, who for one reason or another, receive only partial schooling or none at all? Can we provide more information but stop short of enabling consumers to understand, use and, possibly, criticize it?

A EUROCOOP study shows that, as far as adult consumers are concerned, the authorities tend to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, the job of consumer education being largely left to private initiative, i.e. to the consumer organizations and the technical bodies on which they can call. The main point made by the study is that, as things now stand, there is no real consumer training structure in Community countries and that private experiments, however original some of them may be, are inadequate, uncoordinated and reach a very small proportion of the population; the resources mobilized for consumer education are immeasurably smaller than the vast sums devoted to vocational training. The efforts made by the mass media are interesting, but these too are uncoordinated and do not always meet the needs of consumers or live up to their expectations.

There is no getting away from the fact that a moment's reflection on consumer education upsets acquired habits, since its aim is to make the consumer an active partner in the interplay of social and economic mechanisms.

The concept of continuing education implies a plan for society: education does not exist in a vacuum; it could change society profoundly. This is probably why some people are less than enthusiastic about consumer education although consumer organizations would like to give it the status of a fundamental right. This is yet another reason for the Community to shoulder its responsibilities in this as yet largely unexplored field.

Consumer Representation (Miss Roberts)

Although there is general agreement in Community countries that consumer representation is a good thing, there is not very much of it in practice. But consumer representation is not an abstract idea. It is people being where the important decisions are made and arguing and working to see that those decisions are made in the interest not always of industry, agriculture and business, but as often as possible in the interests of people, of consumers.

Miss Roberts takes the view that for the moment we must make do with members of consumer organizations, who have at least some qualifications to speak up against industry for the consumer. They have some spare energy. They have no business interests. They cannot be corrupted. They are interested in consumer affairs. Their work (often in comparative testing) gives them some technical information about consumer products. They have no party political interest.

Consumer representatives should know, as far as possible, what most consumers need and think and feel. This is an essential qualification. But there are others if representation is to be effective. Obviously, consumer representatives will never be experts, never know as much as the producers on the technical subject - electrical safety, transport management, food additives - being discussed. But they should know enough to be in a position to discuss it intelligently and to know whether the difficulties being put in the way of their suggestions are genuine or not. And they should be informed about committee procedure, know how to negotiate, how best to present their case.

Consumers in Europe are entitled to demand from governments and other authorities that they shall be represented, as now they are not. But consumers, beginning in their organizations, must deserve that representation by talking for all consumers, and by doing so with a background of information, with the right techniques and - we hope - with grace.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

Too many people see Europe as a vintage wine; they assume from the label that the contents will be good yet dare not draw the cork in case the precious liquid has turned sour. So many eulogies penned (or typed as the case may be!) refer to Europe as the "cradle of civilization", to "Europe's priceless heritage", that we may end up believing it ...

Yet the fact of the matter is that the situation of the arts in Europe does not stand up to close scrutiny; there is a lot to be done before the European Community can claim to be anywhere near a policy measuring up to past glories. The whole issue is put into perspective in a recent working paper prepared by Mr. Brunner, member of the European Commission with special responsibility for research, science and education. One needs only to quote some of the steps which could (and should) be taken under the Treaty of Rome to realize will give some idea of the extent of the problem:

- ° simplification of the administrative formalities impeding the free movement of "cultural goods" ;
- ° increased mobility for " cultural workers";
- ° participation by young "cultural workers" in exchange visits to other Community countries ;
- ° abolition of tax barriers restricting the development of foundations and the growth of patronage ;
- ° harmonization of laws on copyright and related rights.

Free movement of cultural goods

"Cultural goods" is the rather strange term now applied not only to works of art but also to the aids - film, projectors, video-recorders and record-players used to present them. Very often the two coincide, as with books, magazines, newspapers, musical scores, films, records and tapes.

Cultural aids are goods like any other and should be subject to the normal rules applying in intra-Community trade. Cultural aids produced in one Community country should be readily available - without too much administrative fuss and bother - not only to libraries, museums, youth centres, schools and the like in other Community countries but also to individuals using them for non-commercial purely cultural purposes.

In the case of one-off works of art, it is obvious that formalities cannot be dispensed with completely : there must be some sort of check to rule out the possibility of theft and safeguard national heritages. But formalities can (and should) be simplified so that the free trade advocated by the Treaty of Rome and particularly justified in this area can be achieved.

Increased mobility for cultural workers

Another odd term - "cultural worker" - is used to describe individuals who earn a living from cultural activities in one way or another. It covers auxiliaries (cinema technicians, art restorers), intermediaries (museum curators, librarians), distributors (antique dealers, publishers, record-shop assistants), performers (actors, singers, musicians, dancers) and the creative artists themselves (writers, composers, craftsmen, painters, sculptors, film directors).

Mobility is hindered by the fact that many of these people believe that they have everything to lose (they only seem to see it in terms of increased competition on the labour market) and nothing to gain (they cannot see that they might find a similar if not better job somewhere else).

It is true that some paintings fetch an enormous price, just as some authors earn substantial royalties and some stars command high salaries. But this should not blind us to the fact that a high proportion of men and women working in the arts earn considerably less than the average worker. Then again cultural workers are obviously not the only section of the population facing unemployment ; but their situation is more acute than most. Even with full employment large numbers of them were out of work in the Community.

If something is to be done to make cultural workers less suspicious of mobility and to combat unemployment in their ranks Community efforts on their behalf must make provision for a social action programme and an information programme.

Young cultural workers

Article 50 of the Treaty of Rome provides for exchanges of young workers within the Community. A joint programme, the second of its kind, is being devised at present to give 18 - to 30 - year olds interested in spending six to eighteen months in another Community country all the administrative help they need. Crash language courses will also be available. The young people will be covered by social security schemes in the host country and some of them will also receive a grant to supplement or replace their salary.

Participation by young cultural workers - and the programme is already at the planning stage - would represent a major step forward : it does not require much imagination to see that a young musician, craftsman or art restorer has a lot to gain from active involvement in a new working environment.

Cultural foundations and taxation

The practice of granting tax exemption and/or tax relief to cultural foundations and patronage systems is fairly common throughout the European Community. But the "incentive" varies so much from country to country that foundations which would be willing and able to operate on a European scale - on the pattern of the Carnegie Foundation in the United States - hesitate to do so.

If national and international foundations are to be placed on the same footing tax exemption and/or tax relief must be accorded irrespective of the country in which the foundation or patron incurs the relevant expenditure. But the tax men are well-known for their caution: Community regulations must help the artist not the tax-dodger.

Copyright

Distortion of competition, interference with the free movement of works of art, discrimination on grounds of nationality - some if not all of these defects are to be found in many national copyright laws. To complicate matters even further, many existing provisions have been overtaken by the introduction of new transmission techniques, such as video-cassettes, cable television and the likes: a composer whose music is transmitted by satellite cannot be paid in the same way as one whose music used to be played at village dances ... A Community directive harmonizing national legislation would also have to make allowance for completely new situations. Resale rights can be described as a sort of copyright in plastic arts, the artist (or his successors) being paid either a percentage of the price fetched at successive sales or a percentage of the "capital gain" each time a work changes hands. Resale rights are unknown in three of the nine Community countries and in the six where they are known the system varies considerably. For this reason sales tend to gravitate towards the countries which do not recognize resale rights and painters, sculptors and the like lose out. The European Commission is drafting a directive which would extend resale rights to all Community countries and all types of transaction.

Man does not live by bread alone. By analogy the European Community cannot live by atomic energy, steel and powder mountains. If "improving the quality of life" is to be anything more than a meaningless slogan, the European Community must do something to give the arts a new lease of life.