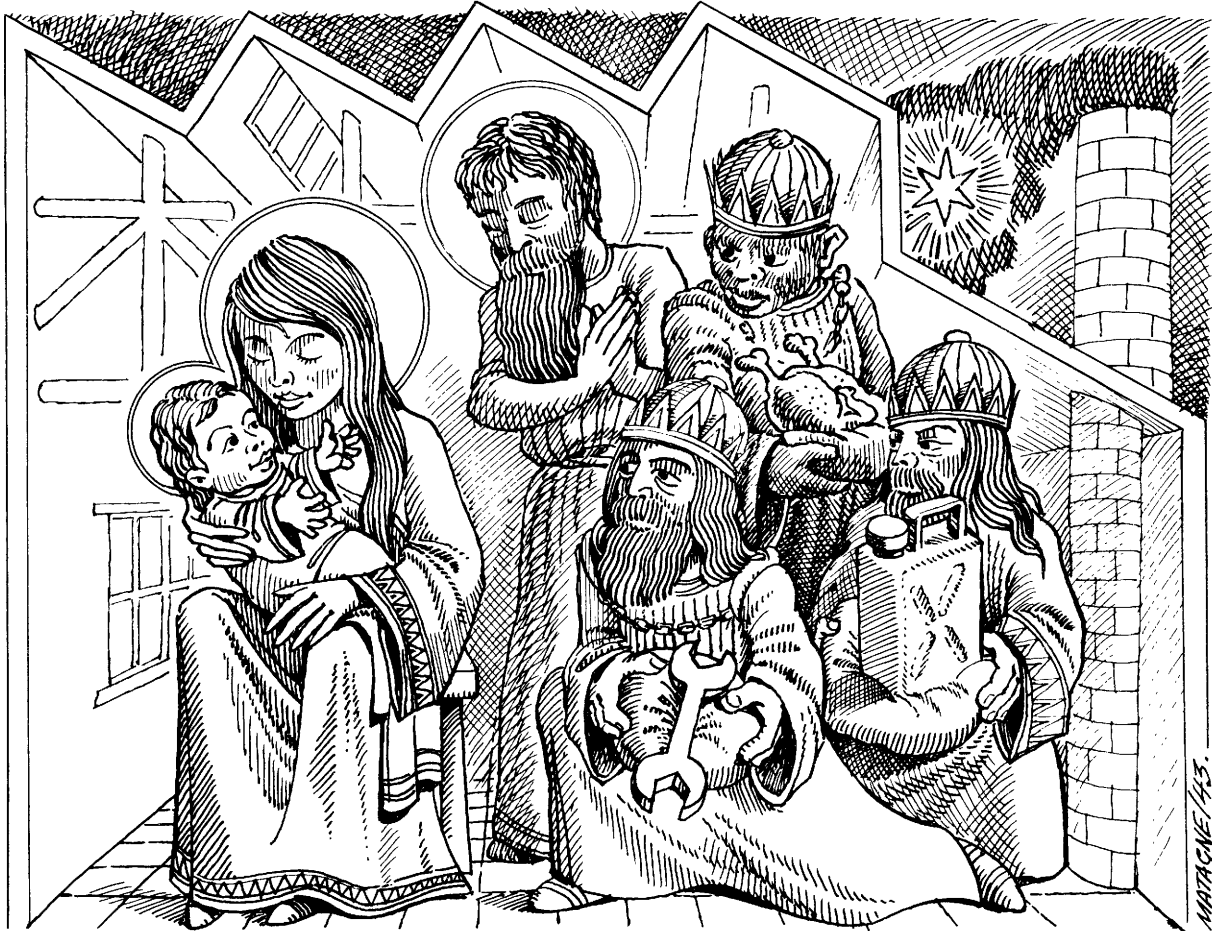


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Nativity for a recession : gifts with a difference for the
Child of an out-of-work carpenter

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++ SOCIAL POLICY ON THE AGENDA

Workers' rights will be safeguarded in all Community countries in the event of mergers, transfers or amalgamations involving the firm employing them thanks to a directive recently adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers.

In ANNEX 1, Euroforum presents the main points on the agenda when Europe's Social Affairs Ministers met for the last time in 1976.

++ ENVIRONMENT : THE COMMUNITY'S "BLUE PLAN"

The new environment programme recently adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers will have quite an impact on the daily lives of two hundred and sixty million Europeans.

In ANNEX 2 Euroforum outlines the main objectives of the programme and takes a look at some of the other issues discussed by the Ministers at their meeting.

++ MOTORONICS - A NEW TECHNOLOGY

The electronic components industry is pressing car designers to make use of its services. Electronics can in fact make a big contribution to car design increasing safety while reducing fuel consumption, pollution and noise.

ANNEX 3 takes a look at some of the critical functions which will be electronically-controlled in tomorrow's car.

++ PEDESTRIANS CAN BREATHE MORE FREELY !

Brave souls who negotiate our cities on foot will be pleased to hear that the European Commission's campaign to control traffic fumes has taken another step forward with the adoption of a Community directive limiting nitrogen oxide emissions.

This legislation is not completely new but rather updates earlier directives on emissions of carbon monoxide and unburnt hydrocarbons to bring them into line with technical progress.

++ SEEKING REDRESS

Where should civil or commercial actions involving individuals or firms from different Community countries be heard ? It was thought that the matter had been settled once and for all by a Community Convention signed in 1968 which specified that cases should be brought before the courts of "the place where the tortious act occurred". But in fact there was still room for doubt : what if a product manufactured in Italy turns out to be defective when it is used in Hamburg?

The Court of Justice of the European Communities recently ruled that the phrase used in the Convention refers not only to the place where tortious act occurred but also to the place where it was originally caused, i.e. the place where the product was manufactured.

The plaintiff therefore has a choice. If, for instance an Italian firm supplies arsenic instead of milk powder to one of its Danish customers, the latter can take an action in either the Italian or the Danish courts.

++ FRENCH MPs AND CONSUMERS

French deputies forming the parliamentary Working Party on Consumer Affairs - which is chaired by Mr. Jean-Marie Daillet, representing the Manche department - met on 14 December at the invitation of the European Commission's Information Services to discuss Community action in the field of consumer information and protection.

++ EASY ON THE EAR

The European Communities' environment programme classifies noise as a major pollutant. But, as any jazz enthusiast will tell you, an amplifier going full blast (120 decibels) for two hours is easier on the ear than an alarm clock (83 decibels) ringing for one minute ! Which only goes to show that the European Commission was well-advised to begin its work in this field by getting some hard information about noise. In a recent communication to the Community's Council of Ministers, it lists the relationships between given exposures to noise and observable effects on human health and the surrounding environment. The areas investigated included sleep interference, speech interference, annoyance caused by outside noise, the effects of noise on task performance, and damage to hearing. Now that the problem has been defined the European Commission can concentrate on the noises that present the greatest health hazard.

++ ENVIRONMENTALISTS MEET

A wide-ranging discussion of the Community's environment policy took place during a working meeting held in Brussels on 17 December between the European Community's Environment and Consumer Protection Service and the European Environmental Bureau, which groups thirty of the leading environment protection associations in the nine Community countries.

Topics discussed included progress under the Community's environment programme, the links between environment and economic development policies, and environmental impact statements. The Environment and Consumer Protection Service also gave a brief run-down of the second environment programme, recently adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers. (See ANNEX 2)

++ THERE'S WINE AND WINE !

Phoney vintages, misleading labels, false declarations : wine has a rough time thanks to the activities of a handful of swindlers operating in the Community. Hard on the consumer's pocket not to mention his health ! In an attempt to combat wine frauds of all kinds the European Commission recently invited government wine experts and representatives of national anti-fraud departments to a meeting in Brussels.

The two-day meeting revealed that improved collaboration could do much to protect consumers and producers alike. When it comes to tracking down culprits, speed is of the essence. In many cases it would help if samples taken when the wine reaches its destination were returned to the country of origin to be analysed a second time. Collaboration along these lines would make it possible to keep a continual check on the identity of wine - and the authenticity of accompanying documents - from the moment it leaves the producer's vineyard until it arrives on the consumer's table.

++ CONSUMER INFORMATION

One of the ways in which the European Commission attempts to improve consumer information is by organizing regular meetings for journalists specializing in consumer affairs for the press, radio and television in the nine Community countries. It believes that these meetings - much appreciated incidentally by those who attend - provide a useful forum for the exchange of ideas and experience and play a valuable part in improving information techniques.

Mr. Jahn, a member of the European Parliament, recently tabled a question to the Commission expressing concern at the notable absence of Danish television from one of these meetings held in Copenhagen last June.

In its reply the Commission assured him that Danish television had been represented on previous occasions ; it was confident that normal service would be resumed in the very near future.

++ RED No 4

Red No 4 (disodium salt of sulphonic acid) is used, among other things, to colour maraschino cherries. The European Commission has just confirmed to Mr. Pisoni, a member of the European Parliament that Red No 4 is not authorized by the Council directive on colouring matters in foodstuffs and that its use is therefore banned in all Community countries.

++ PUBLIC SUPPLIES : A VAST MARKET

The volume of public purchasing in the nine Community countries is put at 7 % to 11 % of gross domestic product. Yet, despite the Community's claim to 'open' frontiers, public supply contracts are rarely thrown open to international or even Community bidders. To encourage free competition in this area the European Commission submitted proposals to the Community's Council of Ministers some time ago for a directive introducing new rules of procedure for contracts of this kind. (see I & S No 10/75).

Only certain categories of contract will be affected, but the sums involved are staggering. As far back as 1972 experts were talking in terms of at least 10 000 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx. US \$ 1.1). Under the new rules all large public supply contracts - in other words, contracts worth 200 000 u.a. or more - covering hospitals, universities, scientific research facilities and civilian materials used for defence purposes will have to be notified to potential suppliers.

++ INSIDE EUROPE

Mr. Emile Noël, who has been Secretary-General of the European Commission since 1958, takes his readers backstage in "Les Rouages de l'Europe". The book, with a preface by the President of the Commission, is published by Fernand Nathan-Labor in its "Europe" series.

++ JUST OUT

The proceedings of the scientific colloquium on "Principles and methods for determining ecological criteria for hydrobiocenosis" organized by the European Commission in Luxembourg in November 1975 have just been published by the Pergamon Press (Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-14624). The main purpose of the meeting was to define scientific bases for assessing the effects of pollution on hydrobiocenosis (aquatic flora and fauna) and biological methods for determining the extent of pollution.

"A preparatory study for establishing criteria (dose/effect relationships) for nitrogen oxides" was produced by Dr. H.M. Wagner (Germany) under the European Community's environment programme. The purpose of the study was to draw attention to the difficulty of assessing the effects of NO and NO₂ on health : in addition to their direct impact they have an indirect effect when combined with other elements. The study, a sale publication, can be obtained from the European Communities' Publications Office, Boite postale 1003, Luxembourg.

"A study to determine the comparability of chemical analysis for drinking water within the European Communities" has just been published by the European Commission in its Environment and Quality of Life Series. The report was prepared by a group of experts and presented by Mr. Sonneborn (Germany). Copies can be bought from the European Communities' Publications Office, Boite postale 1003, Luxembourg.

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SOCIAL POLICY ON THE AGENDA

Workers' rights will be safeguarded in all Community countries in the event of mergers, transfers or amalgamations involving the firms employing them. This was decided when Labour and Social Affairs Ministers of the Nine met in Brussels on 9 December. Community countries have been given two years to put this directive on the statute books.

Four years of discussion

Experts have spent four years discussing the Commission's proposal, a vital part of the Community's social action programme (see I & S No 24/74). There is a marked difference at present between national rules and regulations regarding the rights of workers affected by mergers or transfers. But now the decision has been taken : the text adopted specifies that the rights and privileges of workers must be safeguarded ; the terms of employment contracts signed before the merger must be respected by the new firm and collective agreements will remain in force in their original form until at least one year after the change of ownership.

The question of informing and consulting workers' representatives sparked off a lengthy discussion. Finally it was agreed that workers must be informed in advance of any merger, transfer or amalgamation plans, the length of an arbitration period being left to the discretion of national Governments. If staff reductions are envisaged in the wake of a transfer or a merger, management will have to consult the workers' representatives and the appropriate authorities.

Humanization of living and working conditions (see Euroforum No 19/76) was examined in a Commission communication and the Ministers agreed that priority should be given to the study of shiftwork. This universal problem has social and economic implications which make it a key issue, particularly in heavy industry.

The interest shown by the Ministers in shiftwork augurs well for the studies to be carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, recently set up in Dublin.

Another particularly serious problem is vocational training for young people out of work. (see Euroforum No 30/76). The Ministers took note of a draft recommendation drawn up by the European Commission, which urges member countries to do something to help young people who have never received appropriate vocational training ; courses should be specifically geared to their requirements. It is worth noting that the European Social Fund often supports projects of this type in the Community, concentrating on schemes which can serve as a headline for others.

It is well-known that young people and women are the first to suffer in an economic crisis. However, some commentators argue that youth unemployment is not essentially structural. Obviously the solutions advocated differ depending on how their protagonists read the situation. One of these days a detailed analysis will have to be made of the causes of unemployment among young people, not to settle the argument, but to determine what short - or long - term action is needed.

A memo on the Community's social action programme had been prepared for the Ministers by Dr Hillery, now President of Ireland. The Ministers agreed that the last two years had seen significant achievements and hoped that social policy would continue along these lines. There was much talk of the absentees - the Ministers for Finance and Economic Affairs - whose cooperation is essential to the success of the Labour Ministers' policies. An overall employment policy will have to be devised ; the Community can no longer depend on economic policy alone ; stop-gap measures must give way to a comprehensive approach.

In a period of doubt and difficulty Labour Ministers have provided information on the hopes and fears prevailing throughout the Community which should prove invaluable to the new European Commission.

The Standing Committee on Employment

The following Monday, the Standing Committee on Employment returned to the problem of youth unemployment and examined the European Commission's working paper. The European Trade Union Confederation pressed for coordination of the Community's financial instruments (Social Fund, Regional Fund, Guidance Section of the Farm Fund and the European Investment Bank) and hoped that there would be more cooperation on the use of both direct and indirect resources to promote job creation. Finally, the Standing Committee on Employment discussed the follow-up to the Tripartite Conference held in Luxembourg last June.

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ENVIRONMENT : THE COMMUNITY'S FIVE-YEAR "BLUE PLAN"

The new environment programme recently adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers will have quite an impact on the daily lives of two hundred and sixty million Europeans. Basically this five year programme (1977 - 1981) sets out to improve the quality of life in Europe without compromising economic revival (See Euroforum n° 13/76).

The Community programme which runs to fifty-five pages, selects eight objectives relating to water pollution, air pollution, noise, waste, improved integration of environmental protection and regional development, protection of fauna and flora and the continuation of action begun by the Community and the nine member countries within various world organizations dealing with environmental matters.

A lot of research will be necessary to identify the problems and propose suitable solutions ; the bulk of the programme's budget is in fact earmarked for this. Among other things the Community intends to contribute to environment impact statements, which attempt to assess the effect on the environment of for example, the siting of a new factory. An ecological map of Europe is to be produced to help assess the causes and consequences of pollution.

The general public is showing more and more interest in the fight against waste. Action is already being taken here and there ; for example special paper and bottle collections are organized by local authorities in Brussels. But a much more determined effort must be made to eliminate or recycle the 1 500 million tonnes of waste produced in the Community each year. The European Commission, with the help of its waste management committee will be proposing an overall policy to combat waste, a move which should be doubly welcome in this time of crisis.

International conventions

The Rhine has often been called "the biggest drain in Europe" ; hopefully this will not be true for very much longer. The Community's Council of Ministers has approved the convention on the protection of the Rhine against chemical pollution, which has already been signed by Mr. Scarascia Mugnozza on behalf of the European Community and by France, Germany, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Under this convention countries bordering the Rhine and the European Community commit themselves to eliminate pollution of the river by a number of dangerous substances and hence improve water quality. This is particularly important, since the Rhine is tapped as a source of water for human and animal consumption, quite apart from its use for fishing and direct or indirect supplies of fresh water to industry and agriculture.

Although the Community's Council of Ministers failed to give its blessing to the convention on the protection of the Mediterranean against pollution, it is expected to do so in the very near future. Parliamentary procedures will soon be completed in the United Kingdom, removing the last remaining obstacle to Community participation in this international convention.

Lead screening

The Community's Council of Ministers also adopted a directive on uniform rules for biological screening for lead. Checks on lead in the blood is particularly urgent in view of the health hazard it represents. Lead is everywhere - in petrol, in paint, in pottery, in water pipes - and must be carefully monitored. The results of analyses carried out in the nine countries will be sent to the European Commission, which will also be informed of any national measures taken or to be taken if reference levels are exceeded. The European Commission will then suggest an appropriate action.

Black liquid and red mud

The rivers and seas of Europe are seriously polluted by "black liquid" discharged by pulp mills and "red mud" from the titaninon dioxyde industry. Two Commission proposals for directives in the matter were before the Ministers. Although the texts were not adopted, a measure of agreement was reached and the importance of taking both ecological and economic measures was recognized. "Black liquid" and "red mud" will reappear on the agenda for the Ministers' next meeting scheduled for the first quarter of 1977. They have already affirmed their political willingness to tackle both problems at that stage.

MOTORONICS - A NEW TECHNOLOGY

Electronics will enable the motorist to drive more safely, using fuel, causing less pollution and making less noise. The European Commission will be holding a symposium in the near future on the penetration of electronics into various industries, the motor industry included.

Car designers are still cautious, if not sceptical about electronics. Although certain electronic components are being mass - produced by now, many others are merely at the prototype stage and their ultimate cost is still unknown. It might be interesting to take a look at the areas where electronics can help to streamline tomorrow's car.

Alternators

The electronic current regulator, built into the alternator, is becoming more widespread ; it simplifies electrical circuits and makes battery charging easier.

Direction indicators

It looks as if the electro-magnetic relay in direction indicators will gradually be superseded by an electronic device which could still be used in the event of an accident and will have a longer life than the conventional relay. Similarly, electronic devices are being developed to dip headlights and regulate windscreen-wiper speed.

Fuel injection

Thanks to electronics, enormous progress has been made with fuel injection in recent years : it is becoming simpler, more precise, more efficient, more robust and more reliable. To meet American specifications most European cars exported to the United States are fitted with electronic injection. In fact the American market is being used as a testing ground for equipment which will be standard on all models one day.

The general feeling among experts is that mass - produced electronic injection systems represent a serious threat to the survival of the carburettor, which has become far too complex and delicate.

Electronic ignition

Electronic ignition is constantly improving too : the third generation is already with us and experts believe that the ultimate answer will be an integrated ignition system in which all functions will be exercised by a single component, a large - diameter "superdistributor" linked mechanically to the camshaft and incorporating the pulse generator, induction coil, micro-modular electronic amplifier and high-tension distributor. This will reduce wiring to an absolute minimum: one cable to the battery and high-tension cables to the plugs. Ignition systems of this kind are already quite common in the United States.

Micro-computers

In the more distant future injection and ignition will probably be controlled by a micro-computer. The experts are already talking in terms of a "central computer system", since the micro-computer will be handling other functions too. Sensors located at various strategic points will transmit a stream of data to the central computer, which will process it and then either tell the driver what to do or take over itself.

Although the computer's integrated electronic circuits present no particular difficulty, problems do arise with the sensors, which are not yet reliable enough to withstand the harsh treatment sometimes meted out to cars. Research is still being done on sensors, so that the central computer system will not be with us for a few years yet.

Automatic transmission

In Europe only 2 or 3 % of private cars are fitted with automatic transmission, despite the fact that a smooth transmission cuts fuel consumption. Engineers at the Mullard Research Laboratories have devised an ingenious system which comprises three elements : a petrol engine, a constant speed control and an energy-storage flywheel. These three elements work harmoniously together under the control of a small calculator (called a micro-processor) which links either the engine or the flywheel to the speed control as required. Fuel savings of anything up to 38 % can be achieved and on a medium-sized two litre car the cost of the investment would be recouped after 60 000 kilometres.

Cutting the wires

Japanese engineers working on an experimental car have managed to get wiring down from 425 to 103 meters, reducing the number of connections from 113 to 37. A master conducting cable is run right round the car with a secondary cable to transmit information. Local control units placed at key points activate and control lights, windscreen washers, direction indicators, heating ventilation, transmission and so on, in response to signals from a central micro-processor.

This is not pie-in-the-sky : the Japanese believe that systems of this kind will be in mass production by the early 1980s. European industry will have to get down to serious work if it is not to be left far behind in the race.

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