

Week of June 16 to June 21

ENERGY: EUROPEANS DISAPPOINTED AT OPEC MEETING RESULTS

The failure of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to set a unified price for sales of crude oil at its recent meeting in Algiers has been bemoaned far and wide. No region, however, is more susceptible to rising prices and production cut-backs than the European Community which depends on OPEC countries for most of its oil supplies, with Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Kuwait leading the list.

The OPEC decision to set the reference price at 32 dollars per barrel and to reduce production by two million barrels a day will therefore have a two-fold impact on the Community.

For one, recession and inflation trends will take a plunge for the worse, and second, the spectre of insecure oil supplies will come to haunt the EEC again.

An appeal for extra efforts, both in energy savings and developing alternatives to oil was made by the European Commissioner responsible for energy policy, Guido Brunner, recently. Brunner stressed that if Europe was to acquire "economic freedom", an increased effort would have to be made in these two sectors.

There is some cause for cheer, however. Oil reserves in the Community are high, totalling 113 days. Consumers have also managed to make a 10 % saving in fuel consumption as compared with last year.

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What is "Eurostat" otherwise known as the statistical office of the European Community?

This newsheet is published in six languages (English, French, German, Dutch, Italian and Danish) by the Directorate-General for Information of the

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Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Community institutions.

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HEALTH: Is there a doctor in the factory?

European workers are increasingly being protected from health problems that were once unfortunately written off as "occupational hazards".

While the "mad hatters' disease" of Alice in Wonderland and "black lungs" for coal miners have been the subject of remedial action for years, new and more sophisticated maladies are just now the targets of more attention. For instance, asbestos has been used for fireproofing and insulation for centuries but only recently was it acknowledged as a highly-dangerous substance for the workers who are constantly in contact with it.

Mercury, lead and countless other substances and products have also been discovered to be harmful or even lethal in certain doses.

As a result, authorities in most industrialised countries have been increasingly attentive to the need for regulation of the exposure of workers handling these harmful substances. But feeling that additional measures of protection were also needed at the regional level, the European Community countries' Ministers of Social and Employment Affairs just recently agreed to joint regulations on some of these substances and committed themselves to further action in the fight against the dangers of the factory.

What they did was adopt a plan that will require close medical inspection of workers in industries that use dangerous products. It would require the Community governments to enact measures in the near future to protect workers against the harmful effects of asbestos and lead and also commit them to adopting specific controls for other substances such as arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and others.

The moves are part of a much broader effort to attack the root causes of work-related diseases and health problems begun a few years ago by the European Community. The most important objective of this is, of course, to lessen the exposure of workers to occupational diseases. But another element is the need to unify the national protective legislation of the EEC member countries, so that industries would not exploit the most lenient and thereby give competitive economic advantage to products made under unsafe conditions at the expense of the workers.

TRANSPORT: Uncorking international bottlenecks

While tariff and trade barriers have been coming down with systematic regularity for years throughout Europe, more and more attention is being focused on the obstacles still represented by transportation inefficiency. How many times, as tourists, has the average European wasted hours waiting for traffic to pass through some strategic point going from one country to the next on holiday. As aggravating as that may be, it is nothing to the time, cost and discouragement experienced day in and day out by companies and industries using such bottlenecks as transit points to send their products from their factories or warehouses to a customer. That kind of barrier, such as the Channel, the Alps, the Pyrenees and many other strategic passageways in Europe, probably does more to deter trade than many other more visible economic and competitive factors.

Lost trade represents fewer jobs in a period of high unemployment, which is one of the many reasons more attention is being paid to this particular commercial impediment.

Since national and local authorities generally try to meet the needs of their public for transport infrastructure, what's left is the important international sector, which has seen phenomenal growth in recent years. Since the 1960s the growth in traffic between member states of the European Community, for instance, has been more rapid than internal transportation and in the past decade it has been running at double the rate of domestic traffic.

Transportation also amounts to about 6 percent of the total output of goods and services in the nine member countries, which is a larger share than, say, agriculture. And it represents about 40 percent of public investment.

EEC authorities feel it would be important for the Community to take an active role in the planning and financing of such a connecting transport system. They introduced a general plan a few months ago and just recently held a major conference on the subject in Brussels attended by some 200 participants from all over the EEC. At that gathering, Richard Burke, the EEC Commissioner for Transport noted that "the challenge of future economic and social development calls for a new approach to planning of transport systems in the Community."

DEVELOPMENT: EEC aid for "non-associated" developing countries

While a major portion of the European Community's aid for the Third World is concentrated on the sixty African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries which are members of the Lomé Convention - and to some extent on the Maghreb and Mashraq countries - the Community also has a lesser known but effective annual financial and technical aid programme for other developing countries in Asia and Latin America.

The scope of the programme, and the funds earmarked for such assistance, are more limited than EEC aid to the ACP countries, but the EEC aid does come in useful for Third World countries in such crucial sectors as agriculture and social development.

The EEC's aid programme for the so-called "non-associated developing countries" (compared with the ACP which are "associated") totalled £66,4 million in 1979, and the European Commission is hoping that this could be increased to £84,5 million in 1980. This aid is divided between the three major continents, with Asia receiving 73 % of the assistance, Latin America 20 % and Africa (essentially the two countries which are not members of the Lomé Convention, Mozambique and Angola) receiving 7 % of the total aid. The EEC assistance, which is either given directly to the countries concerned, or channelled through regional integration bodies (such as ASEAN and the Andean Pact), focuses on the development of food production in the Third World. The aid therefore goes mainly to rural development projects, which are often co-financed with other international aid organisations.

In a decision taken recently, the European Commission approved EEC aid worth \$ 23.3 million for five development projects covering four of the poorest Third World states: Nepal, Nicaragua, Thailand and Bangladesh, and the Pan American Health Organisation. Aid to the first three countries will come from the Community's 1980 programme, while the last two projects will be financed from the 1979 programme.

Community assistance to Nepal will total \$ 3.1 million to be used for the development of livestock farming. Nicaragua is to receive \$ 3.9 million to be spent on technical assistance. The aid to Nicaragua is a part of a larger EEC aid programme worth \$ 15 million mounted by the European Community earlier this year. Thailand will receive \$ 3.5 million for the strengthening of the country's agricultural cooperative movement.

Bangladesh, as one of the poorest countries in the world, will receive \$ 11.3 million for the implementation of an emergency grain storage programme. Finally, \$ 1.6 million will be granted to the Pan American Health Organisation for a disaster relief coordination programme aimed at improving emergency preparedness in Latin America.

EUROPE BY NUMBERS ...

Where can you learn that an Irishman consumes 10 kilos of butter per year - five times more than an Italian? Or that France's 14,765 million hectares of forest is twice that of Germany and seven times the size of wooded land area in the United Kingdom? Or that on December 31, 1977, there were 522 telephones for 1000 Luxembourg citizens, compared with 163 telephones for 1000 Irish citizens?

The publications of the European Community's Statistical Office, better known as "Eurostat", are a gold mine of such information.

The Statistical Office was set up in 1958. Today some 300 people are employed by Eurostat in its six directorates. The Office is one of the general directorates of the European Commission and is under the direct responsibility of one of the members of the European Commission. However, most of the Eurostat offices are in Luxembourg, and only a small office responsible for relations with other Commission services works in Brussels. Eurostat depends to a large extent on Commission facilities. It uses the Commission's computer; it cooperates with the Commission's statistical centre, whose major task consists of drawing up the EEC's external trade statistics.

Eurostat focuses on four major areas:

- the supply to the different Community institutions, but particularly the European Commission, of statistical information needed for the definition and implementation of Community policies;
- the supply to Member States and other countries of statistical information on the Community;
- the coordination of statistical activity in the Community;
- assistance to the different national statistical systems needed for European integration.

In the years that followed its establishment, the Community's statistical Office concentrated on seeking out basic statistical systems, nomenclatures, investigation methods and, especially, a complete system of agricultural statistics to meet the needs of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Later, the formulation of other Community policies created the need for statistics in other areas, namely industry, transport, research, education and the environment.

Meanwhile, the need for more analytic statistics was also felt, particularly on external trade and balance of payments - figures which are required for the negotiation and monitoring of trade agreements signed with third countries. The amount of work involved in this sector is enormous: trade figures have to be studied for the nine EEC countries, their trade relations with about 200 other countries have to be taken into account... and such

trade covers about 7,000 different products!

Finally, the economic crisis made it imperative to have rapid and dependable information on economic and social questions, including industrial production and unemployment.

Eurostat faces three major problems: homogenisation of national statistics, the need for rapid publication, and information processing.

The first question is crucial. Working on the basis of national figures, Eurostat must be able to homogenise such information if it is to be used on the Community level. In most cases, the national statistics can be used, although some work is required to make them more homogenous. EEC-wide research, as compared with national research, is only undertaken when there is an enormous difference between the national information. But Eurostat is working on harmonising the statistical systems used in the nine EEC countries.

European Commission officials and other people using Eurostat publications often complain about the delay in publication of the statistics. This delay, which extends to four or five years for some sectors, stems from the amount of work involved, the need to go through the different national statistics, and the amount of information covered in the different areas.

However, Eurostat also publishes more rapid information on sectors which have to be monitored more closely. For instance, a "statistical telegram" is published by Eurostat on the 20th of every month, giving precise information on the monthly unemployment trends within the Nine. In other sectors, in order to undertake its daily management tasks, the European Commission needs quick and precise information on, for example, the supply and demand situation of eggs and meat.

Eurostat also needs to increase its use of computers for the diffusion of its statistical information. Today, Eurostat can supply customers who have their own computers with information contained on magnetic cards.

Eurostat publications account for a fourth of all publications of the European institutions. In 1980, Eurostat published a total of 70 different publications, with an average circulation of 3,500 copies. Sales are limited, as most of these publications are supplied free of cost to the Commission, member states, government offices, the press corps, and other institutions and libraries.

The Eurostat work programme is defined every three years, and takes into account the EEC's changing requirements. Eurostat also collaborates with other international statistical organisations such as the United Nations' statistical office, with a view to harmonising their respective programmes.

Eurostat's task grows more difficult each year ... more and more people are expected to use the information it provides. Its importance in the formulation of European policies therefore cannot be underestimated.

INSTITUTIONS: The European Parliament and women

The role of women in the future European Commission is a much talked-about topic today. In a report submitted by Jean Rey (Belgian Liberal), the Parliament's political committee stressed that the next European Commission should include at least one woman member. Within the Socialist group Yvette Roudy noted that at least one-third of the new Commissioners should be women, and Barbara Castle (British Labour) feels that there should be no fewer than five women Commissioners. The new Commission will take over on January 1, 1981.

Yvette Fullet (French Socialist), for her part, has launched an appeal for the harmonisation of the different national legislations on contraception and abortion. She has expressed hopes that the Commission will take action in this sector.

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Thank you.