

Week of June 9 to 16

Working toward a harmonisation of summer time :

The European Commission has long been working to bring the nine Community countries together to coordinate their policies on the introduction of summer time. The Ministers of the nine countries now seem to be on the verge of agreement on a common date for the introduction of summer time next year. During their meeting in Luxembourg later this month, they should agree on the date of March 29, 1981.

A number of other European non-member countries are also likely to set their watches to the same time, but the United Kingdom and Ireland will still retain an hour's difference from the rest of the Community.

S U M M A R Y

WOMEN	: p. 2	New measures to combat existing inequalities in working conditions
ENERGY	: p. 3	Waiting for the solar miracle
	p. 4	The need to improve EEC supplies of natural gas
AGRICULTURE	: p. 5	A new apple of discord
SOCIAL	: p. 5	Toward freedom of establishment for architects
IN BRIEF	: p. 6	Agriculture - Consumers - Transportation

CLOSE-UP

: p. 7	<u>In our midst the stranger</u>
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Who are the migrant workers ? What is the policy of the European Community toward these millions of persons ? ...

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WOMEN : New measures to combat existing inequalities in working conditions

Two specific new measures aimed at making the lot of working women easier in Europe were urged by a conference on equal opportunities held in Manchester in the last week of May.

For one, the conference called for the setting up of a "European Equality Commission" which would coordinate the activities of the different national "equal opportunity" committees existing in the EEC countries. This new body, as European Commissioner for social affairs, Henk Vredeling, stressed at the meeting, would help the EEC Commission in its task of formulating and implementing policies designed to promote the cause of European working women. The second initiative taken by the conference touches an aspect of working life which has never been dealt with by the EEC : the right of working men to parental leave. The conference called on the European Commission to promote the equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women, and noted that this was an essential precondition of the effective implementation of the EEC's directives on equal pay and equal treatment. As such the Manchester meeting urged the Commission to consider a directive which would recognise the rights to "family or parental leave", as well as facilities for the care of children and services for dependents.

Another important aspect studied by the conference concerned the impact of new technologies on jobs held by women. These new technologies are developing in those very sectors where women have traditionally held the majority of the administrative jobs : banks, insurance companies, etc. Mr Vredeling recognised that "the development of new technologies constitutes a real threat to existing jobs", and this was also echoed by the other participants in the meeting. Further studies of the exact repercussions of these new technologies will, however, have to be undertaken by the European Commission.

The meeting also stressed that in most EEC countries the taxation and social security systems have a "disincentive" effect as regards the employment of married women. Generally speaking, tax systems discourage married women going out to work, noted the conference.

Segregation of the labour market is another major problem facing working women today. The meeting recommended that the EEC should formulate general guidelines on "positive action" programmes to integrate women in the labour market and encourage pilot schemes to train women for non-traditional jobs, particularly for jobs created by new technologies.

The urgency of such measures is clear if one looks at the EEC's unemployment figures : of the total of the working population in the EEC, 6.9 % of women, are unemployed to 5.1 % of men. This trend has to be stopped as rapidly as possible.

ENERGY : Waiting for the solar miracle

After all is said and done, what exactly will be the share of solar energy in Europe's total energy supply ? According to some experts it will amount to 5 or 10 percent, while the European Commission in Brussels estimates from 2 to 3 percent only. Many have been surprised by these modest expectations in view of the benefits of solar energy, which would seem to offer a miracle solution to the energy crisis. In fact, sunlight gives off 10,000 times more energy than humanity can consume. In a day and a half, the sun sends off about the same amount consumed up to now by the world in fossil fuels such as oil and coal. Measured by the square metre, central Europe gets about half the amount of intensity beamed on the Sahara. This would indicate that solar energy is not just some pipe-dream, but the problem is to tap it economically enough.

But while the sun's rays may be free, the equipment necessary to transform this raw light into usable energy is still extremely costly. That's why commercial use of this equipment is still very limited.

One of the main obstacles still in the way of widespread use of solar energy as a main source of power lies in the fact that the public is still badly informed and that it continues to associate solar energy with science fiction. Information about solar power is still largely in the hands of specialists and not the mass media or public institutions.

To fight this lack of information, the European Commission in Brussels has already launched two appeals for proposals for demonstration projects in this field. Among the numerous applications made, a certain number received European Community financial support for up to 40 percent of the total cost.

In addition, the EEC Commission in September will present awards to nine projects submitted by young European architects for housing heated and lit by solar energy.

The Community has also undertaken the construction of a solar power station in Adrano, Sicily, that is expected to be operational by the end of the year. And the Community supports research by European scientists which offers opportunities for manufacturers in the nine member countries and helps to finance and develop pilot projects.

So, if solar energy has not yet shone bright on the man-in-the-street, it nevertheless offers enormously promising possibilities.

ENERGY : The need to improve EEC supplies of natural gas

Natural gas today plays an important part in Europe's efforts to reduce its dependence on imported oil. The European gas industry is in relatively good shape. Domestic production totals about 190 billion cubic meters, and consumption of natural gas is on the way up. In fact, the share of natural gas in total EEC energy consumption is thirty times more than it was twenty years ago, and natural gas today is as important a source of energy as coal.

However, the picture is not as rosy as it seems : there are indications that not only will gas production decrease in the Community, but that this will be accompanied by an increase in imports from third countries. Such a situation could lead to Community vulnerability vis-à-vis its external suppliers, which, as experiences in the oil sector have shown, is something to be avoided. Community dependence on external gas supplies is expected to reach 25 % in 1980 but could rocket to 50 % by 1990.

The Community's natural gas market has been studied by the European Commission which notes the following three major characteristics. For one, production from the most important European gas fields (essentially in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) have begun to show signs of decline. If new fields are not found, experts at the European Commission predict that production could drop by half by the end of the century. Secondly, although new import contracts will partially cover the increase in demand and the fall in domestic production, this will not be enough to maintain the share of gas in total energy consumption at about 20 %. Finally, problems related to certain contracts, for instance, with Iran and Algeria, could lead to supply crisis in some parts of the Community.

The Community imports natural gas under long-term contracts (20-25 years) from Algeria (41.9 %), Norway (24 %), Soviet Union (17,5 %), Iran (7.4 %), Nigeria (6.8 %) and Libya (2.4 %).

The Commission has drawn up a series of Community and national guidelines which it hopes will be able to halt a worsening situation. These guidelines focus on three main areas : the development of domestic gas production, particularly in the North Sea; diversification of gas imports, and Community aid for those imports and development of channels which require heavy investment; and finally, the development of substitution gas from coal.

A further study on the ways of improving the Community's gas supplies is currently being undertaken by independent experts who will submit their conclusions to the European Commission.

AGRICULTURE : A new apple of discord

As if to underline the fact that not all of Europe's farm problems vanished with the recent agricultural agreement, dozens of farmers demonstrated in Brussels a few days ago about the danger of yet another "mountain" of surplus products.

The latest protest was aimed at what British growers feel is a growing competitive threat of apples from across the Channel. This French "apple mountain", British growers claimed, is encouraged by low-interest government loans that stimulate production which is then exported to the English market. The problem is especially acute with the "golden delicious" variety which sells in Britain at prices lower than the domestic varieties.

So in a reversal of the recently-terminated "lamb war" between France and England, the British growers are urging a blocking of appel imports from France or a boycott of the French fruit by British consumers.

As a result, it appears as if the European Community will shortly have a new apple of discord and a new mountain to contend with.

SOCIAL : Toward freedom of establishment for architects

Free circulation of workers between the member countries is one of the many objectives of the treaty that founded the European Community.

But in practice, one of the conditions for exercising that right is the acceptance by all the Member States of diplomas and certificates awarded in the other countries.

For some professions requiring lengthy and specialised training, the road to acceptance varies in length or standards from country to country. A considerable amount of time is necessary to expand cooperation and iron out the differences in these requirements sufficiently to permit the mutual recognition of diplomas and other professional certificates.

Up to now, the progress has primarily concerned medical and paramedical professions such as nursing, veterinary medicine, dentistry, mid-wives and others. But for each of these specialities, from 6 to 10 years have elapsed between the introduction of proposals by the European Commission and the decision of the Council of Ministers setting the terms of achieving this freedom to practice a profession. It now seems that an accord is also near adoption concerning architects in the Community countries after waiting since 1967.

As the old saying goes, "all good things come to those who wait".

IN BRIEF :AGRICULTURE : Agreement on working hours

An agreement on working hours has been reached between employers and workers' organisations in the agricultural sector. This agreement will lead to the introduction of a 40-hour working week in the livestock farming sector.

However, UNICE, an organisation which represents European employers' interests in the industrial sector, has rejected European Commission proposals for an EEC-wide approach to the question of working time in the industrial sector.

AGRICULTURE : Community world's second leading exporter

EEC sales of farm products to third countries increased by 77 % during the period 1973/78, while imports grew by only 49 %. However, despite these encouraging signs, the Community continues to import three times as many farm products than it exports. 70 % of its imports include raw materials and other products for which there is an EEC deficit. The Nine are still, after the United States, the second largest exporter of farm products in the world.

CONSUMPTION : Not just any mineral water

A directive aimed at harmonising Member States legislation on the exploitation and marketing of natural mineral waters was adopted recently by the EEC Council of Ministers. This directive gives precise instructions on the processing procedure and additives used, protection against contamination and the information which should be included on the labels.

TRANSPORT : Consultations with interested circles

More than 200 representatives of the EEC's transport sector, travellers, and national and local governments, attended the colloquium on transport infrastructure held in Brussels, June 6. The participants analysed the memorandum on transport infrastructure presented by the Commission in 1979. This memorandum was received favourably.

Encouraged by the support it received, the Commission is expected to persevere in its efforts to receive ministerial backing, and to eliminate current problems in transport (the Channel, the Messine Strait, the Rhine-Saone link and the Brussels-Luxembourg-Strasbourg link, etc.)

IN OUR MIDST THE STRANGER

Although the influx of foreign workers into the European Community has been brought to a virtual standstill since the advent of the 1973-74 oil crisis, a new and difficult phase is on the horizon concerning the future of millions of migrant workers.

The Community is the home of some six million migrant workers, who, with their families account for a total of about 12 million within the EEC borders. And it is about them and future arrivals that European authorities and others are increasingly concerned.

Since the European Community treaties guarantee freedom of movement for citizens of one country to work in another, some of the migrant workers in the Community are citizens from Italy, Ireland or the other EEC countries. But 73 percent come from countries outside the Community. They are mostly British Commonwealth citizens, or from Turkey, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Spain and Algeria, all accounting for from 400.000 to 600.000 workers, and from Greece, Morocco or Tunisia. On average, foreign workers account for nearly 8 percent of the work force in the Community. Germany has the largest number with 1.9 million, while France and the United Kingdom each have about 1.6 million. Above that average, 36 percent of Luxembourg's paid workers are foreign and 11.1 percent of France's are in the same category.

First of all there is a considerable attention being devoted to the employment and living conditions of these workers and their families currently living in the Community. Even though immigration has virtually ceased since the economic crisis and some countries have even begun expelling foreign workers who are out of work, the unemployment rate for these workers is among the highest in the Community. They are not only among the first victims of a reduction in the labour force, but they still face discrimination in their ability to draw social benefits and in their general housing, health and educational conditions. In addition to frequently living as a marginal element in the host country, many of these workers or their families also have little contact or affinity with their original home, if they are forced to return.

That's why national governments and European institutions have all sought to establish programmes of vocational training, health, education or housing especially aimed at this important segment of the population. While laws and programmes, although difficult to agree on, can be adopted, racial discrimination has been and probably will be harder to wipe out. Prejudice against a different colour, religion, language or style remains a serious problem for the foreigner in most societies.

Another worrisome prospect for many in European Community Governments is the possibility that hundreds of thousands of additional workers will be added to the already abundant labour pool in the Community in the coming years when Greece, Spain and Portugal are expected to join the EEC.

Few difficulties are expected from the entry of Greece in 1981 because fewer citizens of that country have been leaving in recent years and because the terms of Greek membership did not provide for unlimited access to the rest of the EEC until 1988.

But the thousands more from Spain and Portugal will be the subject of difficult discussions during the negotiations between those countries and the European Community.

Another major source of difficulty in recent years has been the still high numbers of illegal foreign workers. It is estimated that some 10 percent of the foreign workers employed in the Community are working "in the black" without declaration, work permits or social protection. These are exploited by unscrupulous employers who want to undercut the legal and accepted standards for salaries and working conditions, thereby creating an unfair competitive situation against those which pay a responsible wage and social benefits.

While in principle there is freedom of access and equality of treatment for EEC citizens into other Community countries, obstacles such as different professional qualifications and requirements are only slowly being reduced through cooperation inside the Community. But treatment of third-country immigrants is still subject to national laws of the EEC Member States. The European Commission in Brussels has sought to increase the amount of cooperation and similarity between laws and officials of the Member States as a way of equalizing treatment and conditions for foreign workers.

But a draft proposal setting forth guidelines for all countries concerning treatment of foreign workers, illegal workers and the persons employing them has not been acted upon by the representatives of the national governments in the Council of Ministers of the EEC since it was introduced in 1976.

With record unemployment still climbing in the Community work force and the possibility of even more foreign workers entering that labour pool in the coming years, all these issues are taking on a new importance and urgency.