

Week of April 13 to 17

S U M M A R Y

- p. 2 LAW: Man calls for equal opportunities
Once in a while it is men who feel that they are being discriminated against. The European Court of Justice has been hearing what happened when a British Rail worker tried to retire early.
- p. 3 POPULATION: Divorce rates soar as population declines
The fabric of European society may be changing. That was the conclusion of figures recently published, which show a decline in population growth, fewer children and more divorces.
- p. 4 CULTURE: Europe's Year of Music - 1985
Do you like Bach? Händel? Scarlatti? Have you even heard of them? If not, you probably will in 1985, which is their 300th birthday and the "European Year of Music".
- p. 5 SOCIAL: European Parliament fights for frontier workers' rights
Frontier workers who live in one country and work in another have a rough deal. The European Parliament has been looking into ways of helping them.
- p. 6 INDUSTRY: EEC bid to save textile industry
Europe's embattled textile and clothing industry needs a breathing space to restructure itself. New negotiations designed to regulate the exports of Third World textile producers to the European market will begin in May this year.
- p. 7 COMPETITION: European Commission calls for limits to state aids
Firms hit by the recession should not expect subsidies for an indefinite length of time, according to the European Commission's 11th report on Competition Policy.

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LAW: Man calls for equal opportunities

The principle of equal rights for men and women as far as working conditions - and unemployment rights - are concerned have been a part of EEC legislation for several years now. One might even say that the European Community has led the way in this field. Every European citizen also has the right to appeal to the European Court of Justice if he or she feels that they are the victims of discrimination.

In the majority of cases, it is women who claim they are being discriminated against, but a recent case proves that "discrimination" can also work the other way around.

Several months ago, a Mr. Burton, a worker employed by British Rail, asked to be allowed to benefit from a voluntary retirement scheme, but his request was rejected because he was not 60 years old. He then complained that he was being treated less favourably than a female colleague who received a pension at the age of 58.

Under British law, the minimum age for receiving retirement benefit is sixty-five for men and sixty for women. The Board of British Rail authorises early voluntary retirement for workers who are five years away from minimum retirement age.

The British courts consulted the European Court of Justice to find out whether the conditions set down by British law concerning the right to ask for early voluntary retirement benefit at 60 for men and 55 for women was, in fact, discriminatory and therefore contrary to Community law.

But the Court of Justice said that the fixing of a minimum retirement age for men and women when it comes to receiving social security benefits was not discriminatory under existing EEC legislation.

The result? Mr. Burton will have to work a few more years before being able to receive his, no doubt, well-deserved pension.

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POPULATION: Divorce rates soar as population declines

In the mid-1980's, the population of the ten European states totalled 271 million - more than either the United States or the Soviet Union. If the population of the two countries up for EEC membership - Spain and Portugal - is included, the figure reaches 318 million, or 7% of the world's population.

But the rate of increase of people in the EEC countries is lower than elsewhere. European populations will increase by a mere 2.3% by the end of the century, compared to 14% in the United States, 10% in Japan, 17% in the Soviet Union and 40% in the rest of the world. Europeans (including Spain and Portugal) will only represent 6.2% of world population in 1990 and a mere 5.3% by the year 2000.

This decline is particularly evident in West Germany where the birth rate is now actually lower than the death rate. In other EEC states the birth rate is still slightly higher than the mortality figures, except in Ireland where birth rates are twice as high as in West Germany. Greece and France also have high rates.

Although demographical trends are not the same in every EEC state, a certain number of shared traits can be seen when it comes to the ways in which they affect society. For example, an analysis of divorce rates can be difficult because of the differences in legal procedures, but national statistics show that divorce rates are on the increase all over Europe. In the EEC as a whole, the number of divorces has almost tripled in 20 years, except in Ireland where it is not yet recognised.

The UK tops the list with six times as many divorces in 1980 as there were in 1960; Denmark is second. Over the past twenty years the number of divorces has tripled in France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. The number of people getting married has also fallen throughout Europe, and the number of illegitimate births is up, although national statistics do not always reflect this trend.

Europeans who are still getting married normally do so a little before their 26th birthday if they are men or just before their 23rd birthday if they are women.

CULTURE: Europe's Year of Music - 1985

Two-hundred and fifty years ago, much of Europe, just as it still does today, was humming or listening to the haunting, ageless melodies of Johann Sebastian Bach.

In those days without the vast television networks or record distribution systems that unite the musical world today, hit tunes did not become overnight sensations the way they can become now, for example, after the Eurovision Song Contest. But very much the way some of today's top performers enjoy popularity beyond their native land in other European countries or across the world, those 18th century stars were international celebrities whose talents were shared by citizens of many countries. Because men like Bach, Georg-Friedrich Händel and Giuseppe-Domenico Scarlatti were as much Europeans as they were Italian or German, they still form part of Europe's common cultural heritage. That's why it has been decided that the year 1985, the 300th anniversary of their birth, will be designated as the "Year of European Music".

The decision was recently announced by the European Commission and the Council of Europe, who will jointly sponsor and prepare the event. The preparations will be made by a prestigious committee headed by former West German President Walter Scheel.

The festivities will mark the culmination of an enterprise designed to stimulate popular interest in music. But in addition to recalling the important musical legacy left to posterity by these immortal composers, the Year of European Music will also have a more contemporary and practical theme. Among its main objectives will be to draw attention to the works of living composers, to offer opportunities to young musicians, to promote music in general regardless of type or period, to improve musical education and training, to improve the living standards of musicians, composers and teachers, and to improve access to musical activities, especially for the young and for minorities.

In another example of Europe's promotion of music, it was recently announced that the European Community Youth Orchestra had awarded music scholarships worth 8 million lira (approximately 6000 European currency units) to two young Italian musicians who were victims of the recent earthquake in Naples. Fifteen-year old Giovanni Borrelli, a pianist, and twenty-one-year old cellist Emery Cardas both had their studies interrupted by the closure of the Academy S. Pietro a Maiella in Naples because of the earthquake.

SOCIAL: European Parliament fights for frontier workers' rights

There are about 260,000 people in Europe who live in one country and work in another. They are defined as frontier workers. While this cross-frontier work contributes to the establishment of human contacts and cultural exchange, there are also a number of problems associated with it.

Because of their jobs, cross-frontier workers often live on the edge of society, unable to fully participate in the cultural, political or trade union activities of both the country in which they work and the country in which they live. They are often dependent on foreign tax, legal and economic systems. As a result, they are among the first to bear the brunt of the delays and imperfections of frontier formalities. The European Parliament recently examined their problems and suggested that special European economic and social measures should be introduced to help them. Every day cross-frontier workers are subjected to customs checks which prolong their normal working-day. Parliament has asked EEC member states to make certain facilities available to them and to establish certain special entry and exit points for them.

Professionally, the frontier worker is frequently regarded as a source of reserve labour and is therefore particularly vulnerable. These workers should enjoy the same sort of employment security as other workers and should have access to the same vocational or retraining courses, say the Parliamentarians. As far as taxes are concerned, they would like to see a Community-wide system. They feel that an overall policy at the Community or even international level is the only answer.

But transfrontier migration also indicates regional economic inequalities that should be remedied. Border regions are often weaker economically than central regions and their unemployment rates are sometimes twice the national average, particularly during recessions.

In a number of regions transfrontier workers represent 30, 40 or even 50 percent of the labour force. Migration across borders normally occurs in only one direction and communities supplying the manpower often become nothing more than dormitory towns.

INDUSTRY: EEC bid to save textile industry

After a hectic six months in 1981 spent negotiating the terms and scope of a new international agreement on world trade in textiles - the Multifibre Arrangement - the European Community's textile negotiators are back in Brussels with a mandate to begin bilateral talks with the EEC's main textile supplying countries in the Third World. The discussions with over 28 developing countries which are members of the MFA, and some 8 countries in the southern Mediterranean will begin in May this year and hopefully result in the conclusion of a series of "export restraint agreements", to regulate sales of Third World textiles on the EEC market. European leaders approved the negotiations at a meeting of foreign ministers held in Brussels in March and would like to see new bilateral agreements concluded within nine months.

But the EEC negotiating stance is likely to be a tough one, given the crisis currently affecting Europe's textile industry. The challenge has come from three main sources; the rapidly industrialising and highly competitive developing countries of South East Asia, the United States (which threatens European production of man-made fibres), and the fact that in Europe itself, consumption of textiles has fallen because of the economic recession.

This has resulted in the loss of about a million jobs, and the closure of about 4,200 textile firms in Europe. Despite these figures, the Community's textile and clothing industry still accounts for roughly 8% of the manufacturing industry's contribution to the Community gross national product, 9.5% of jobs in manufacturing industry and 30% of women's jobs. The survival of the sector is therefore of crucial importance to the European economy. Even today, ridden as it is with crises and difficulties, the EEC's textile industry is still the world's foremost export industry.

Discussions between the EEC negotiators and Third World representatives are not expected to be easy. The European Community has made it clear that the "dominant" suppliers of textiles - Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Macao - will have to renegotiate their quotas. Other countries looking for an increase in their textile exports to the EEC are also expected to be disappointed. But the European Commission says that the five-year breathing space granted to the textiles industry by the new MFA will be spent in plans to modernise and restructure the sector.

COMPETITION: European Commission calls for limits to state aids

European businesses are currently facing a recession which has already caused numerous bankruptcies and put many firms to the wall. More and more frequently companies are turning to the state for help. Public authorities are consequently being subjected to increasing pressure to subsidise tottering industries and the jobs that they represent.

The question of state aids is a problem that figures prominently in the European Commission's 11th annual report on competition policy in the European Community. As a general rule, the Commission tries to be flexible in order to find a realistic balance. It condemns the systematic use of financial aid, especially in crisis sectors such as textiles, shipbuilding or the steel industry. It holds the view that state subsidies are short-sighted remedies that don't lead to real solutions to the problems of firms. Public assistance, it says, merely delays inevitable adjustment and is a waste of public funds.

Nevertheless, the Commissioners do not reject outright subsidies granted to European firms. But they insist that all subsidies granted should only be for a transition period. As a result, they are sympathetic to aids designed to help firms adapt to new energy prices, to help technological development and to relieve youth unemployment.

The recently published report also touches on the question of business concentration. It has become increasingly evident that when confronted by crises, European companies have a tendency to unite. While the EEC favours cooperation aimed at improving competitiveness, it opposes agreements which involve restrictive practices designed to isolate national markets.

Throughout the report, the Commission tries to adopt a long-range view of the problem. Its main objective remains to adjust the Community's industrial structure to the new requirements of the world market. It reasons that by maintaining healthy competition inside the Common Market, European business will be better prepared to face the ruthless competition of the international arena.