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France: Good Europeans

Intereconomics

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COMMENTS

FRG

Wildcat Strikes

The Federal Republic has — for the time being — recovered from some hectic weeks in the wages sectors. Strikes have been multiplying in the last four months, especially in factories in the metal processing industry. Their significance lies not in the strikes as such but in the fact that over 122,000 wage-earners stopped work regardless of existing wage agreements, without a previous ballot, contrary to the trade unions' duty to avoid conflicts as long as a wage agreement is valid and thus independently from and against the intentions of their own organisations.

The reason for these spontaneous actions is obvious: With progressive taxation the wage improvements agreed upon at the beginning of this year were no longer making up for the loss of purchasing power due to the rise in prices (7.9 p.c. in June and 7.2 p.c. in July). The strikes by means of which the workers tried to win this race between wages and prices after all have been a shock for employers, trade unions and the Government in Bonn alike.

The strikes are a token of a change of attitude and heightened self-confidence on the part of the German workers. Besides, this is the first time that the "guest workers", i.e. foreign labour, formerly a quiescent and compliant group, have been "mounting the barricades". In some factories they even played the part of vanguard, forming a particularly hard core of the strike movement. Both these developments have made wage-earners more prone to engage in labour disputes without or even against their own organisations. The wild strikes have given the employers a foreboding of harder clashes to come, alerted the trade unions to a threat to their traditional wages policy and the danger of losing contact with their rank and file, and put the success of the Government's anti-inflation programme into jeopardy. Whatever else they may herald, the German workers are about to make up for the "strike arrears" in comparison with their colleagues in other countries.

France

Good Europeans

As long as there has been an EEC, France has been wont to behave as if it knew best what had to be done in the interest of the Community and a united Europe. And it so happened that the interests of the Community very often coincided with those of France. These it felt called upon to uphold as the champion of a united Europe.

It need not cause much surprise therefore that the Federal Government has now given the French Minister of Agriculture cause to suspect that its members are "less good Europeans". For the common agricultural policy, which in the French view is the chief merit of the Community and its only bond of union, is now threatened from two sides. On the one, agricultural protectionism will on US prompting for the first time be a topic in the coming GATT round. On the other, there is a growing inclination in the Federal Republic to seek a reform of the common agricultural order because it has not lived up to the original expectations. It is no launching pad for the European economic and monetary union but rather a major obstacle. More important still, it has grown into a Moloch who is devouring money by the billion, strangles everybody with red tape and forces European consumers not only to pay extortionate prices for their food but to subsidise out of their taxes butter sales at bargain prices to the Soviet Union. The institution has become a scandal which is getting worse, and the only people who are still in its favour are the farmers, especially the French ones. They receive the lion's share of the disbursements from the EC agricultural fund.

The present method of financing agriculture was forced on the EEC by de Gaulle in 1965/66. He exerted pressure which almost amounted to an ultimatum. The fund on which from the beginning of next year regions like southern Italy and Scotland should draw for structural improvements to cope with their economic arrears has so far fallen a victim to it, for France is afraid that part of the money set aside for financing agriculture would have to be drawn off to endow this fund. This accounts for the differences of interest. Some French politicians ought to beware of talking about "good Europeans".

kw.

China

A Model for Development Aid in Africa

China's most costly development project to date will be completed successfully earlier than had been expected. The first section of the 1,800 kilometre "Tanzam" railway line from Dar es Salaam to the border of Tanzania and Zambia was finished in late July. The rail route from Capetown to Cairo which Cecil Rhodes had in mind will become a reality, thanks to Peking. Another 1,800 kilometres only will be needed to complete the Capetown—Cairo route when the Zambian copper belt has been linked with Dar es Salaam in 1974.

The construction work with Chinese help started only in 1970 after Julius Nyerere had been turned