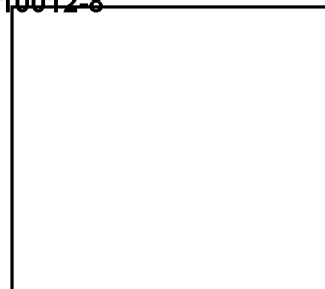




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Western Europe Review

21 March 1979

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WESTERN EUROPE REVIEW [Redacted]

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Prime Minister Barre on two recent occasions has tried to link the violence that has accompanied labor demonstrations in northern France and Lorraine with the French Communist Party. [Redacted]

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The campaign for the European Parliament elections, although only just beginning, gives weight into the interplay of European and domestic political issues, the role of European party confederations, the nature of the new Parliament, and the role of the EC Commission. [Redacted]

France: The French Communist Party and Labor Unrest

Prime Minister Barre on two recent occasions has tried to link the violence that has accompanied labor demonstrations in northern France and Lorraine with the French Communist Party. He has openly accused "adversaries of the government's European policy" (read Communists and Gaullists) of exploiting the unemployment crisis for political reasons and whipping up violence. Barre has also issued a stern warning to "those who appear to be using the same tactics they used a little more than 30 years ago"--a reference to insurrectional strikes in 1947.* The Communists have retaliated by accusing Barre of being caught up in an "anti-Communist delirium."

Barre's tactics of placing the onus on the Communists conforms to French political tradition. It was used by the government in allotting the blame for student and worker riots and demonstrations in May 1968, although the evidence clearly indicates that the Communist-led CGT trade union and the French Communist Party were both taken aback by the student demonstrations and initially opposed them. Communist leader Georges Marchais, in fact, called the students "bogus revolutionaries," and trade union leaders tried unsuccessfully in the initial stages to keep the student and trade union elements apart. The socialist oriented CFDT was, in fact, much more sympathetic to the spontaneous strikes than the CGT.

Confronted with the choice of trying to control the workers or being undermined by the undisciplined

*In the current French political atmosphere, however, any action of an insurrectional nature would only result in the party's further isolation. For a more appropriate comparison, Barre might have cited the Renault strike of 1947, carried out by the Communists and the CGT in order to put the brakes on an action that had been initiated by Trotskyite elements. The Communists acted in order not to be outflanked on their left.

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rank and file, the CGT joined in the strikes and demonstrations in 1968, but neither it nor the workers wanted a genuine revolution. The CGT leadership was interested in specific measures: wage increases, reduction of hours, guaranteed employment. The "revolution" of 1968 collapsed, in fact, when the trade union element that gave the movement its strength became convinced they could obtain their objectives by normal bargaining. Trade union discipline was restored with remarkable rapidity, the French public left for the Whitsun weekend, and the "revolution" was over.

The violence accompanying the current labor unrest probably represents more of an evolution in the French worker movement than deliberate Communist strategy. The branches of the steel industry most affected by the government's current restructuring are those in which the Communists are strongest. Steel is an old labor-intensive industry where Communist organization and the traditions of the class struggle have produced an authentic political culture that identifies with the Communist Party and the CGT. Communists are also strong in metallurgy, mines, and shipbuilding--the latter also scheduled for eventual restructuring. Newer industries, such as data processing and chemistry, tend to be organized by the CFDT. An exception is Lorraine where the CFDT is a strong rival of the CGT in steel and metallurgy.

Small wonder that the two labor federations approach negotiations in a different fashion. The CFDT does not question the need to restructure steel--its main concern is to assure the maximum compensation for the workers. The CGT wants the restructuring halted because it sees its "reservoirs"--where it traditionally recruits party militants--threatened. The situation is the same for the Communist Party since many of its leaders have come out of the trade union movement.

Since the March elections, the Communist Party has been losing support among more politicized workers who were drawn to the party because of the union of the left strategy and now feel the party has discredited itself. It has been trying to make up for this loss by recruiting younger workers--those just entering the job market and those at the lowest end of the wage scale--a change from the "workers aristocracy" which has been characteristic of the French Communists. These elements are more likely

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to resort to violence, and the CGT was openly disturbed to see many 15- to 18-year-olds among the rock throwers in some of the more recent violent demonstrations.



Violence in the town of Denain

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Observers on the scene in Denain, a small northern town where steelworkers clashed with police, reported, however, that even some of the older steelworkers lost their heads. It required a skillful speech by CGT head Georges Seguy--who informed the workers that they had "won"--to restore order. But the CGT has, in fact, been playing a double game--here negotiating and calming

*This photo taken from L'Express.

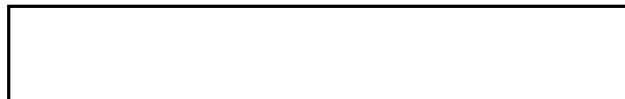
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down the workers, there organizing occupations of factories and egging the workers on. Part of the CGT's double game appears to stem from divisions within the leadership over how best to exploit the situation.

The Communist Party, already politically isolated, has to play its cards carefully. It cannot let the workers get too far out in front of it, but neither can it appear to condone violence. Thus the local Communist Party in the Ardennes disassociated itself from violent demonstrations there and blamed the CGT. L'Humanite, on the other hand, announced its solidarity with the violent demonstrators in Denain. In general, however, the Communist Party is careful to place a distance between itself and uncontrolled elements, particularly those using firearms. The principle of a workers' march on Paris, about which the CGT and CFDT are still arguing, poses a real problem for the union and the Communist Party because it is becoming more difficult to organize a demonstration in the capital without some violence occurring. What the French call the "autonomes"--unorganized anarchistic perpetrators of violence--would probably seize the occasion of a Paris demonstration to stir up trouble. And the workers, confused by the government's contradictory statements and perhaps by the Communist Party's double game, have shown they are vulnerable.



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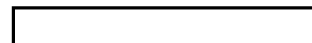
Direct Election to the European Parliament



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Direct elections to the European Parliament--which will be held between 7 and 10 June--were foreseen in the Treaty of Rome over 20 years ago but they are more the result of the desire of member states to resume progress and revive interest in European integration. Although the campaign has hardly begun in several countries, it is possible to make some suggestions about:

- The interplay of "European" and domestic political issues and factors.
- The role and functions of European-level party confederations in the campaign and in the organization of the new Parliament.
- The nature of the new Parliament.
- The EC Commission's role.



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European and Domestic Factors

At this stage of the campaign, the importance of the EP election in domestic politics varies greatly from country to country. The sharpest contrasts are found in West Germany, where only the most politically active are conscious of the election at all, and in France, where the campaign is already actively contested. Interestingly, while "battle weariness" from domestic elections has been cited as the cause of West German voter apathy, the current cantonal elections in France do not seem to be having the same effect.



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The importance assumed by the EP election is also related to the degree of agreement in each country about the nature and desirability of European integration. The best example is France, where the campaign is in part a referendum on the nature of "confederal" Europe. In other countries the situation is less clear. Substantial anti-EC sentiment in Denmark and the United Kingdom has

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not yet led to very intense contests, even though an electoral alliance of Danish anti-EC groups will put up a joint list of candidates. In the United Kingdom, where anti-EC sentiment is prominent in the left wing of the ruling Labor Party, the slate of Labor candidates has much less anti-EC coloration than many observers expected.

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Several countries have had to consider the timing of domestic elections in relation to the EP election. Local elections in Ireland and in three of the West German states and national elections in Luxembourg are already scheduled to coincide with EP elections. More significantly, national elections in Italy and the United Kingdom may be scheduled very near the 7-10 June EP elections.

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The problem of timing is largely a choice between having a more "European" election in terms of issues and having a more participatory election, in terms of more active party roles and larger voter turnout, that a national election would presumably elicit. There is also the danger that a national election held shortly before the EP election would preempt the latter in terms of both issues and participation.

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The situation is further complicated because coincidence of a national or local election with the EP election is thought to work an advantage for one or another party. Thus, the West German regional elections may hamper the Social Democrats in the EP election by mobilizing more voters in conservative areas. Conversely, Italian Socialists have favored coincident elections in the hope of capitalizing on the Europe-wide Socialist campaign and the popularity of their northern comrades. Even without a coincidence in timing, the EP election may become a significant test of domestic political strength, particularly in France, but possibly in Belgium and Ireland as well.

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Given the early state of the EP campaign in most countries and the vagueness of the "platforms" adopted by the European party confederations, little can be said about the relative importance of "European" and "national" issues. Nevertheless, France, the one country where the campaign is well under way, demonstrates two possible

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trends. First, despite the rhetorical battle over the nature of "confederal" Europe, it is clear that specific voter interests, particularly those of steelworkers and farmers, are being addressed. This commingling is not necessarily inimical to European integration, at least to the extent that it stimulates voter interest in the EC that is not overwhelmingly negative. Further, it is probably inevitable as long as "European" issues lack strong, immediate impact on voters. [REDACTED]

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Second, the French Government is carrying into the electoral arena an existing tendency to make domestic political capital out of its initiatives at the Community level. This again is not negative if it fosters interest, and it may create pressure for more decisive action at the Community level. Nevertheless, in the short run it can lead to frustration at all levels, and on occasion may hoist a government by its own petard, as France was in trying to extract concessions on agricultural policy by delaying the European Monetary System. [REDACTED]

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Party Confederations

The three loose coalitions of like-minded national political parties playing active roles in the election--the EC Socialist Confederation, the European People's Party (EPP, composed of Christian Democrats), and the EC Liberal and Democratic Federation (ELD)--are related more or less directly to the corresponding groups in the current European Parliament. Notably absent from these coalitions are the British Conservative Party, which has a different historical experience from its ideological counterparts, and the French Gaullists, who have proved unable to create an electoral organization with their Danish and Irish EP colleagues. French and Italian Communists, who differ strongly on the future of the EP, have repeatedly failed in their efforts to coordinate their campaigns. [REDACTED]

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The three confederations are each coordinating electoral activities such as major rallies, exchange in speakers, and using common identification symbols and some centrally prepared literature. This does not obscure the fundamental differences between the national member parties, that is, the West German Social Democrats and the British Labor Party. These differences appeared

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earlier in attempts to draft common election programs, but the fact that the attempts were made overshadows the vagueness of the resulting documents and the differences revealed. In other words, these confederations aspire to a role in policy direction customary for a European party, and not that of an electoral organization. [REDACTED]

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The differences between national parties in each group, however, and the national party control of election lists, make it unlikely that the confederations will have a major policy role in the new Parliament. Although the groups will presumably continue to sit together, the individual delegates will probably look to their national parties for whatever policy direction the limited functions of the Parliament require. The French Gaullists have gone so far as to adopt a "relay" system under which many elected Gaullists will serve only one year in the EP, and then resign in favor of others lower on the party list. This will inhibit the growth of delegate interest both in expanding the powers of their assembly and in developing more potent European-level party organizations. On the former issue there is the possibility that opposition may coalesce among French Communists and Gaullists, some British Laborites and French Socialists, and presumably the Danish anti-EC forces. Speculation about more than de facto cooperation on this issue in the new Parliament remains only that. [REDACTED]

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The New Parliament

In the absence of supranational parties and decisive powers of its own, the European Parliament will be very much what its members make of it. Whether the body assumes a constructive role among EC institutions will be greatly influenced by the vision and political skills of the members. The issue is thus one of the quality of the delegates. [REDACTED]

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Until now the Parliament has been assured of some minimum quality and experience in its members by reason of their participation in national assemblies. In fact, a number of highly able figures gravitated to the EP. With the decision for direct election arose the question of the "dual mandate"--whether it would be better to allow delegates to serve in both national and European Parliaments, at the risk of absenteeism, or force the young and ambitious to serve in the more powerful national

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chambers. The issue also embraces the effectiveness of delegates as lobbyists at home for the EP, a role they would be better equipped for, but perhaps less eager to play, as members of national parliaments. The decision on dual mandates was left to the national parties, most of which will allow it, but the incidence of national parliamentarians standing for the EP has been low. [REDACTED]

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What has developed is, in a sense, the worst of both worlds. The election lists include a smattering of prominent parliamentarians (Brandt, Strauss, Mitterand, Marchais, Chirac, Tindemans, Thorn) and experienced public figures (West German labor chiefs Vetter and Loderer, candidates in several countries with experience on the EC Commission staff), and a large number of parliamentary novices. The danger is that the ranks of the experienced are too thin, too heavily committed elsewhere, or politically too disinclined to provide much constructive leadership. Some of these stars seem to have been chosen in order to invigorate interest in the campaign, but may in fulfilling that role raise expectations of the new Parliament beyond what it can live up to. This is particularly true of the German trade unionists. [REDACTED]

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A further danger, to the extent that the campaign takes on real intensity outside France, is that the chief campaigners may need to separate rhetorically their national slates from association with their partners at the European level. This could be Brandt's position, for instance, toward the French Socialists, rather than risk being tainted with CDU/CSU insinuations of a "union of the left" or "popular front." There are, however, indications that, whatever the new Parliament may be, the national parties do not intend to be dominated or outflanked in it by their confederation partners. To that end, parties are seriously attempting to field able candidates. There is clearly an opportunity for the party confederations to augment their role by giving new delegates procedural and technical guidance. [REDACTED]

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The Commission

The EC Commission, potential ally of the new Parliament in any effort to expand the latter's role, has had a limited but controversial role in the campaign. The

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leak of a portion of a Commission-sponsored "Eurobarometer" survey in January resulted in a decision to suspend such polling for the duration of the campaign. The controversial section, based on surveys conducted in November 1978, showed voting intentions for the EP elections that strongly favored the Socialists, with 38.5 percent of the Community vote. Objections were loudest from an ELD delegate from France, where the poll showed a Socialist plurality of 39.7 percent. [REDACTED]

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The Commission, in cooperation with the staff of the Parliament, has also mounted a nonpartisan informational campaign to stimulate voter interest in the understanding of the EP. This effort drew fire when a brochure of the London EP office inadvertently linked the human rights situation in France to that in the USSR, Chile, and elsewhere. The information campaign continues, however, and it should contribute both to the atmosphere of the election and to voter participation. Whether the new delegates see themselves as defending national interests or as working to enlarge the EP's role, a more successful election process will enhance their position. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

Voter participation remains the most significant imponderable in the EP election. A substantial turnout will point toward the advances in political integration ostensibly sought by the member states in holding the EP election. The heavy participation in the recent French cantonal elections may be a positive sign, but Italian and British election schedules will play a major role. It is also safe to say, however, that significant political integration in the near term is considered unlikely--or perhaps even unwelcome--by many EC member states. [REDACTED]

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As for the functioning of the new Parliament, a learning period can be expected before its voice will be influential. The Parliament's attitude on the expansion of its role may not become clear very soon. Further development of the European party confederations may depend on the progress of the Parliament itself rather than vice versa. [REDACTED]

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