Editorial

MAN IN A EUROPEAN SOCIETY

(Intergovernmental work programme of the Council of Europe, 1967–68)

WHILST the pros and cons for Britain's entry to the Common Market are being bandied across Europe, the floor of the House of Commons, the pages of all the press and the television screens, it is sobering and salutary to consider the potential for development of the culture and society in Europe which is envisaged in the work programme emanating from the Council of Europe (Strassburg). The necessary raising of our own horizon from the narrow, political self-interest—national, personal or professional, is a humbling exercise. The appreciation that there are far wider and bigger issues affecting humanity in all of Europe is too often forgotten.

The report made to the Consultative Assembly of the European Community in April 1967 is fascinating. To quote from it:

> The development of modern technology based upon massive scientific progress has already altered the whole structure of politics and society, and has greatly extended the horizons of the individual man, who now enjoys possibilities of a wider and richer range of experience than anything dreamed of by preceding generations. But the same process has created problems for society which are new, complex, diverse and increasingly numerous. Though having their ultimate origin in scientific and technological advance, many of these problems present themselves as juridicial or social in character, while others are of a more directly material nature, for example in the public health field. A large proportion of them involve difficult political considerations which might hamper individual governments in their efforts to take practical action. Unless they are adequately dealt with by governments, however, there is reason to fear that by abuse of the great power over his environment which man has had conferred upon him, he may destroy the material and moral bases essential to the existence of life in society.
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> The character of the problems now beginning to appear is such that only in the very largest States can the citizen look solely to his own national government to solve the greater part of them. In all other States affected by the development of technology, man must look beyond the frontiers of his own land to a process of inter-governmental co-operation for the solution of many of the problems of life in the 20th century. Because the States of Europe are relatively small, yet technologically highly advanced, it is in Europe that these new problems of international co-operation first make their appearance. In our continent man thus finds himself not only a member of a nation State, but also, whether he likes it or not, a part of a wider community of European dimensions. His

future well-being is intimately bound up with the wisdom and skill with which this wider society is to be managed. The intergovernmental work programme of the Council of Europe is an instrument in the hands of governments for this purpose. By way of conventions and agreements and the adoption of joint measures, it offers the possibility of gradually evolving by intergovernmental action a structure of co-operation which will enable man in Europe to live so as to enjoy the full benefits of being a European.

Under the general title of " Man in a European Society "—a phrase which indicates the general purpose of the programme, the activities are organized into chapters, each with a precisely phrased heading. Each of those headings describes certain agreed aims in that particular field of activity, all of which are designed in turn to contribute in a practical way by intergovernmental action our statutory aim of greater European unity.

The method of the programme is to select year by year, projects in each chapter so that they in turn contribute to the aims stated at the head of the chapter. Thus the programme as a whole consists of individual projects each designed to further the aim of greater unity among our 18 member states in its particular field of activity.

The work programme mechanism is essentially intended to be an instrument in the hands of governments and for the use of governments, whose exercise can be subjected to parliamentary scrutiny by the Consultative Assembly. In the course of the past year the European Community has gone far to translate what to begin with perhaps looked like an isolated secretariat initiative into what the Americans would call a piece of corporate management. That is because the permanent representatives of governments in Strassburg have acquired an extremely thorough understanding of the methods of operating such a programme. They themselves now have it firmly in their hands. The small number of staff responsible for operating the work programme have now fully understood and developed the techniques necessary for their task and the Consultative Assembly has evolved a parliamentary procedure of scrutiny.

Subsequent chapters are on Economic Structure, the Legal and Administrative Status, Human Rights, Prevention of Crime, the Social Structure and Welfare, Health and Hygiene, Physical Environment and Resources, Formal Education and Scientific Attainments, Cultural Development, Youth, Non-formal Education, Sport.

The committee of ministers, including as it does, representatives of ' the six ' and of ' the seven ', has concerned itself with spheres with indirect economic implications. Examples are, in the legal field, the work of patents and trademarks, on the international transport of animals, and on hire-purchase; in the field of public health, the work on noise abatement and the protection of foodstuffs; in the field of ' environmental questions ' the work on air pollution and conservation, and soil erosion and reafforestation; finally, the Committee of Ministers has decided to add two new activities to the Economic Chapter, both of them of high practical importance. The first concerns consumer protection, a vast subject in which a number of organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, are now working.

The second new activity is highly specialized: the preparation of

standards for the construction and use of motor vehicle tyres. This is a problem that has arisen from the new motorways (autoroutes, Autobahnen, autostrade) that have given what amounts to a new dimension to motor travel in Europe. For tourists and for commercial purposes, motorways are a blessing. But the toll of road accidents will mount unless tyres are built and maintained to withstand the strain of travelling at high speeds over long distances.

The section on Health and Hygiene is the one that interests us most and what a wide scope it shows: the medical care in the 18 member States should improve or benefit from the work programme setting out to find a solution on the European plane to practical problems facing member countries and their peoples.

To enable each country to benefit from the experience of all the others the council has worked out a programme of fellowship for medical and para-medical staff (about 140 a year) and also a ' co-ordinated fellowships ' scheme under which experts from several countries together study each year a medical subject of common interest. The Council also organizes annual blood transfusion training courses.

Several European agreements have been drawn up to enable medico-surgical equipment to be pooled in case of need. Another agreement gives free access to thermoclimatic resources. Blood products are the subject of two further European agreements and in the same field work is now proceeding on the establishment of a European standard for haemoglobin. It is hoped that in 1969 the Council of Europe will be able to propose standard rules in this matter which will lead to substantial savings in the use of blood. The results of all these agreements are assessed continually by the European Public Health Committee. It will be noticed in the aims at the head of this chapter that reference is made to " the impact upon man of modern society and techniques ". Certain problems now being dealt with by the Council indeed arise directly from the accelerated pace of technological progress in Europe: examples are the protection of foodstuffs at the handling and distribution stages; means of lowering the cost of medical treatment; the establishment of a social and medicosocial policy for old persons; the medical aspects of road accident prevention and the effects of noise on health.

The three new projects which the council has decided in principle to undertake in 1968 all concern urgent and practical questions on which action on European level would be helpful for the individual. First comes the establishment of European precepts to enable parents to guard against dangers to the safety of their children. The standardization of the education and the equivalence of diplomas of

medical laboratory technicians will facilitate the free movement of this essential category of para-medical staff and help member countries lacking such personnel. Finally, the Council will undertake the preparation of a Convention on the transport of corpses designed: " to meet the difficulties that arise from the combination of increased expectation of life and increased international tourism ".

Concerned and absorbed as we are in the vital and necessary developments on our doorstep, it is thrilling to realize that there are farsighted people whose job it is to develop and push on, if even at a snail's pace, with the development of the European citizen.

MEASUREMENT OF QUALITY CONTROL IN GENERAL PRACTICE

The Australian College of General Practitioners offered a prize on the subject *Objective measurement of quality control in general practice*. This followed a move with the same intent initiated by the Tasmania Faculty Board, and the two prize essays have now been published as a supplement to Volume 12 part 2 of *Annals of General Practice*, June 1967.

These essays make interesting reading especially to those who have worked at the problem of assessment of quality in general practice. As might have been expected, no definitive answer has been found to this problem, but the whole field is well described and many thought-provoking ideas put forward. Dr J. M. Last, the first prize winner, questions the effect of the size of a doctor's list upon the quality of his work, suggesting that Parkinson's Law applies and that work expands to fill the available time. He asks "Are frequent, brief doctor-patient contacts better than less frequent but longer ones? " He mentions the following factors which must be taken into account when assessing quality of practice: equipment and premises, site of care, access to hospitals, the doctor himself, the doctor-patient relationship, the use of ' medical audits ', the mechanism of diagnosis (probability statement, pattern recognition), referral rates, therapy, communications, continuity of care, effects of care (mortality and morbidity follow-up studies), and detection rates, and makes a number of comments about these. He mentions giving treatment without first arriving at a diagnosis when this seems appropriate. He challenges the concept that continuity of care is necessarily good and suggests that it has potential dangers—" familiarity breeds contempt ".

Dealing with the evaluation of quality, Dr Last discusses how medical records may be examined (the medical audit), how clinical performance may be assessed, and how the use of services may be measured; but he concludes that it is meaningless to apply hospital standards to general practice and adds " each practice may be as unique as a fingerprint ". He evidently cannot offer a solution to the main problem although he describes it extremely well.