

## Editorial

### Is the Pope a Catholic?

The row over the succession to Jacques Delors brings back memories. The British Prime Minister no longer wields a handbag, but the effect is much the same.

If Jean-Luc Dehaene came asking for my vote, I would find it hard to give it to him. Greater familiarity with hunger is generally desirable in a politician. And I would treat with the utmost suspicion any candidate who emerged apparently from nowhere at the last minute, although at least he did not describe himself as a Literal democrat.

The President of the Commission has become a very significant appointment. Jacques Delors used the position to push the development of the Community forward in ways he wished to see. His term of office, originally two renewable years, was extended by the Member States – all of them, mark you – to ten.

Suggestions have been made, and denied so hotly as to give them credence, that Mr Major's stand had more to do with domestic politics than with concern for the future development of the Community. Indeed, Mr Major probably cannot indulge himself with any ideas about the future development of the Community while he requires the support of a parliamentary party which in large parts wants to see no such progress.

The same was the case with the distribution of votes following the next enlargement. The Prime Minister is obliged by domestic considerations to pick fights at the Community level which he cannot win, marginalising the UK in the process and laying the ground for a Franco-German axis which will foist further decisions on their partners.

The changes made by Maastricht to the process of selecting a President are, in fact, the sort of changes which those concerned about the democratic deficit should welcome. Previously, he (there has never been a she) was simply appointed by common accord: each

Member State had a veto, though Mr Major's predecessor chose not to exercise it in the case of Jacques Delors.

The governments of the Member States now nominate by common accord the person they intend to appoint as the President, on which they will consult the Parliament (as in practice they already do). The nominee will then be consulted by the governments before they nominate the intended Commissioners.

The entire Commission (President included) will then be voted on as a body by the Parliament. If the Parliament approves them (presumably by a simple majority) they will be appointed by common accord of the Member States.

The genuflection towards the notion of democratic control is perhaps small, and is easily negated if two large Member States seek to dictate that on which their partners may reach common accord. However, the fact that there is a role for Parliament is important, and indicates that (notwithstanding the change in the complexion of the Parliament, or at least its UK representation) Mr Major's choice of fight is the wrong one. He will probably have bigger fish to fry, and his back benchers will be angrier when he is unable to win them.

And at the end of the day, like Mr Dehaene or not (and who knows much about him?), leaving aside the excellent claims of Sir Leon Brittan and Peter Sutherland (whose emergence as a candidate would be the redeeming feature of this whole episode), who can be surprised that the job should have attracted candidates of a federalist bent? The Community is a federalist institution, tempered (unnecessarily, since subsidiarity is inherent in the concept of federalism) by the wording of Maastricht. Does anyone question why the pope should be a Catholic?

*Peter Groves*