

# spending eec funds

Who decides how money from the European Community's structural funds gets spent in this country? We could be talking about as much as £4,000 million over the next four to five years coming into the country from the European Regional Fund, the European Social Fund and the Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

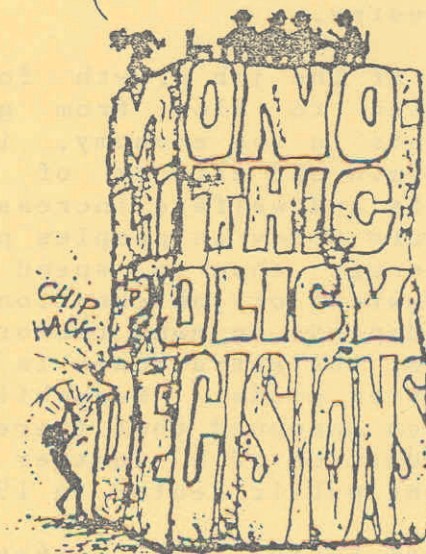
The question has become extraordinarily important because increased monies from these funds is the big carrot being held up to Ireland to get us into the Single European Market (post-1992). The argument runs that, thanks to help from these funds, Irish business and Irish workers will have acquired the skills and facilities by 1992 to be able to compete on an equal basis with companies in any other area of the European Community.

A parallel can be made with the big boost in farm incomes that was promised to get us into the EEC in the first place. The big boost came but the extra income was spent in a way that had very limited impact on the rest of the economy and did nothing to put agriculture on a sound development path. Will the same thing happen over the next few years? Will increased money from Europe get spent in a short-sighted way by one major interest group (in this case, not farmers but the construction industry)?

The Budget speech let us know how the Government views the process. It seems that, last October, when Jacques Delors, the current president

of the European Commission, visited the Taoiseach (then in the Mater Private Clinic), broad agreement was reached on this approach: the key headings to guide spending are to be "transport", "environment" and "employment creation"; what is needed under each heading is to be examined for each of seven regions in the country.

RELAX - IT'S ONLY A COMMUNITY WORKER



For each region, therefore, what is called its NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF COMMUNITY INTEREST will be drawn up; the seven programmes will be reviewed by the Department of Finance before being forwarded by the Government to Brussels as the country's DEVELOPMENT PLAN for the next five years - this is to happen before 31st March; the European Commission then vet the Irish Plan and prepare what they will call the COMMUNITY SUPPORT FRAMEWORK which becomes a type of statement of intention by the European Community as to what type of thing they will fund and where in Ireland over the next five years.

There is need for a lot more public and local attention to be given to this whole process. In his Budget speech, the Minister spoke of "an extensive local consultative process on the preparation of the (seven) sub-national programmes" "to ensure local interests will have an input." Presumably these words were for the European Commission's benefit. Even TDs and local authority councillors have been ignorant of what was going on, let alone Centres for the Unemployed or community groups. In each of the seven regions into which the country has been divided, however, there is a Working Group - largely made up of civil servants - beavering away on a programme for that region while, assisting it, there is an Advisory Group which is largely made up of established interest groups.

It is important that your organisation should know just what new by-pass, road, tourist development, or whatever, are being put forward as the priority needs for businesses and workers in your region. Find out just who is on the Working Group and the Advisory Group in your region and demand to know what the projects they are considering. For their names, contact either the Department of Finance or the Combat Poverty Agency. Also the Community Workers Co-operative have co-ordinated a campaign demanding that the elimination of poverty be a priority in the use of the Funds and seeking representation of community groups and trade unions in the formulation of the NPCI. They can be contacted at:  
39 Upper Gardiner St., Dublin 1.  
Tel. (01)732802. ■