

1992 AND YOU

MENTION 1992 to most people and their faces go blank. For all the media hype and gobbledegook produced on the subject many of us are none the wiser. Cheaper cars and drink are the first things which spring to some minds while others are convinced that 1992 is the sequel to George Orwell's classic novel 1984! Maybe a few of us, if put on the spot, might trot out something about the 'creation of a single European economy', or the 'abolition of trade barriers'. At least it sounds impressive — even if no one has a clue what it really means.

But perhaps our interest would be greater and our attitude different if we realised how intimately 1992 will touch our lives. Consider for a moment the following changes it will bring about:

- After 1992 passport controls will no longer apply. We will be able to come and go wherever we like in the EEC for as long as we like.

- We will be able to work anywhere in the Community without going through the usual red tape procedures currently involved in getting work permits.

- Everything should be as cheap here as it is in Germany, France or Britain. This will mean an end to cross-border shopping in the North and to duty-free shops at airports and passenger ferry ports.

*Two years from now
your life will change
with the dawning of a
new Europe.*

*Ursula Halligan
explains what is ahead.*

- We will be able to get insurance policies, bank loans and mortgages from a wide range of European institutions, although the Irish insurance industry will not be subject to full competition until the end of the 1990s.

- With the removal of exchange controls we will be able to invest and save our money anywhere in the Community and get the highest rate of return going.

- Government contracts and tenders for public work will no longer be the preserve of home producers, but will be thrown open to Community competition.

- VAT and excise rates across Europe will be brought closer in line. This may mean an end to smuggling, more expensive basic foods, cheaper luxury items such as videos, televisions and microwaves, and cheaper alcohol, cars and petrol.

- There will be no restrictions on where we can buy a house in the EEC.

That, at least, is the theory behind 1992. How things will work out in practice is another matter. Many of the long-term effects of these changes are already being debated and include the following:

- Some observers reckon that emigration will lose its stigma of shame and national tragedy in the context of 1992. The ageing profile of the European mainland they say will make Ireland's young and skilled workforce an attractive pool of labour to draw upon. In time a job in London, Bonn or Paris will be seen as the mark of success for any young person with serious job ambitions. In 'Euro-speak', emigration will be known as 'increased mobility of labour' and will be seen as perfectly natural.

- But trade unionists worry that the increased mobility of labour will be only one way as far as this country ▶

