ished and pained by the proposal to keep the level of coal production in the Community at 240 million tons a year—minable coal reserves in Western Europe are virtually all in Britain and West Germany, and cost of coal research and production could be high.

Reservations about an energy agency are doubtless reinforced by experience with Euratom, the European atomic energy agency. Ironically, Euratom was in part a product of an energy crisis that did not occur. The Suez war of 1956 seemed to raise the threat of reduced supplies and higher prices of oil. The threat did not really materialize, but the post-Suez atmosphere encouraged the six member countries of the Common Market to collaborate in developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Euratom's poor track record is generally attributed to the unwillingness of the Community's member nations—particularly France and Germany—to sacrifice the interests of their own national nuclear industries to a Community effort. Other factors contributed. Euratom scientists were granted civil service status from the start, and many used their job security to pursue their own specialized scientific interests, in some cases not very hard. There were individual exceptions, of course, and some good work was done. But, in general, the Euratom staff "lost their scientific reputation," as one Brussels official put it, and came to be regarded "like museum guards."

Disenchantment with Euratom by 1968 was strong enough to cause the discontinuance of multiyear budgets and the start of 5 years of grudging, annual budgets which made continuity in the agency's program impossible. Euratom research is carried out in four laboratories—at Ispra in Italy, Geel in Belgium, Karlsruhe in Germany, and Petten in the Netherlands. Of these four labs, which comprise the agency's Joint Research Centre, Ispra is the largest and was reputed to be most notably in decline.

Part of Euratom's problem was that, while other useful areas of research might beckon—environmental research, for example—the agency's latitude in broadening its program was severely limited by the Euratom treaty and, later, by the agency's lackluster reputation.

Finally, last year the newly enlarged Community moved to deal with the Euratom problem. A 4-year budget was granted on the understanding that the agency would be roundly reorga-

Briefing

House Fails to Pass Metric Bill

Prospects for adoption of a coordinated national metric conversion plan appear to have foundered for the time being.

On 7 May the House voted not to vote on its metric conversion bill. So the bill is dead for this year, barring the unlikely event that Olin E. Teague (D–Tex.), chairman of the Science and Astronautics Committee, decides to bring it up again under a different rule. While the vote reflected doubts on the part of House members about the desirability of a 10-year voluntary conversion plan, the specific objections were to the voting procedure that Teague had decided on, which would have eliminated all discussion and prohibited any amendments. Teague chose to risk defeat of the measure rather than to allow amendments that would have committed the government to shelling out indefinite sums for retraining of workers, reimbursement for the purchase of metricated tools, and loans for small businesses. (see *Science*, 5 April).

Members of the Senate (which passed a conversion bill in the last Congress) decided this year to await House action before moving ahead with their metric conversion bill, which has been reposing for some time in the Commerce Committee. There is still no action planned in the Senate.

The problem seems to be that proponents of metric conversion have not prepared the ground sufficiently for favorable action. Many thought an official conversion plan, which requires minimal funding, would sweep through Congress. In fact, many congressmen are ill-informed about or politically wary of metric conversion, and it may be that a good deal more education and public discussion will have to take place before definitive action can be taken.—C.H.

Government Support of Research Queried

What is the proper role of the federal government in biomedical research? Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Secretary Caspar Weinberger has been wondering about that. He thinks a presidential commission could give him the answer.

In response to a request from the Office of Management and Budget for "program initiatives," Weinberger suggested creation of a special panel of scientists to examine what the government is doing in biomedical research. He would give them a year and ask them to look not only at research programs supported by HEW but also at those sponsored by other federal departments and agencies including the Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission. Obviously a fair amount of attention would be focused on the National Institutes of Health, but Weinberger definitely has a government-wide review in mind because he would like to know how programs in various places are related to each other. He also wants to know more about the support research receives from private institutions and foundations and from industry and how their money fits into the total enterprise that is biomedical research.

As Weinberger envisions it, the presidential panel would be composed of well-respected scientists, many but not all of whom would be giants in biomedical research. To prevent undue bias, the rest of the panel members, possibly including the chairman, would be drawn from those working in the physical sciences.

News of the Secretary's proposal has, already, made a number of people very nervous.—B.J.C.