

Nuclear Policy on Hold Until After French Vote

The government of new French President François Mitterand has increased speculation about the future of the world's most flourishing nuclear power program by ordering a freeze on new nuclear power projects. The order does not affect plants already under construction. Broad government policy on nuclear matters is not expected to be defined until after a promised debate next fall in the new parliament that will be chosen in the impending French elections.

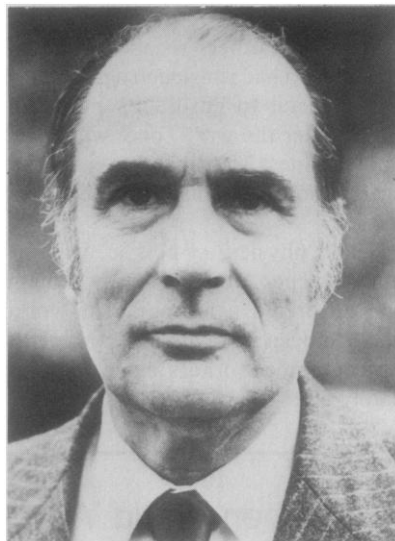
The freeze is consistent with a promise in the campaign platform of Mitterand's Socialist Party to complete reactors now being built but not to make major decisions about the inherited, highly ambitious nuclear power program (*Science*, 22 August 1980, p. 884) until after a national debate on energy.

Suspension of nuclear testing at France's Mururoa test site in the South Pacific was announced by the defense ministry at the end of May; the suspension was lifted a few days later. Policy decisions on strategic arms and nonproliferation issues also will await reconstitution of the government after the elections.

On the matter of nuclear power, Mitterand played a cautious hand during the campaign, adhering generally to the party platform. Within the Socialist Party, attitudes on nuclear energy range from outright opposition to solid support of the big nuclear power program, including breeder reactors. (The party platform calls for completion of the Super-Phenix breeder, but beyond that is noncommittal.)

Since the presidential election, the nuclear power issue that has drawn the most attention has been a controversial plan to build four 1300-megawatt power reactors near the coastal village of Plogoff in Brittany. The project has attracted bitter local opposition and been given symbolic status by the vigorous national antinuclear movement.

Mitterand's appointee to the newly created post of Minister of the Sea appeared to be playing to this constituency when he announced that the Plogoff project had been "canceled."



François Mitterand

An under secretary of the energy ministry, however, followed smartly with a clarifying statement that Plogoff was simply included in the freeze.

Both the Communist Party on the Left and conservatives on the Right strongly support nuclear power so Plogoff is a symbol for them too. With crucial elections looming, the government seems to have sought to pull the plug on the Plogoff issue.

—John Walsh

Human Life Bill Arouses More Opposition

Nearly 1300 scientists and researchers from Harvard, MIT, Brandeis, and Tufts have joined the growing chorus of those opposed to the controversial "Human Life" bill (S. 158) now being considered in the Senate (*Science*, 8 May, p. 648). The bill attempts to bar abortion by declaring that protected human life begins at the moment of conception, an idea the bill claims is supported by "present day scientific evidence."

This premise is "a misuse and a misunderstanding of science," according to the petition signed by 1283 scientists, including 147 faculty members and six Nobel laureates. Taking a cue from a resolution passed recently by the National Academy of Sciences, the petition states that "science cannot define the moment at which 'actual human life' begins." The

signers also deplored Congress's attempt to undermine what they said are reproductive rights of women guaranteed by the Supreme Court.

The petition was written by a newly formed group calling itself Harvard Scientists for Reproductive Health. The six Nobelists who signed were David Baltimore and Salvador Luria of MIT, and Walter Gilbert, William Lipscomb, George Wald, and Konrad Bloch of Harvard. Also signing were the chairmen of the Harvard, Tufts, and Brandeis biology departments.

Similar opposition has been expressed by the American Medical Association (AMA), whose board of trustees recently voted to lobby actively against the bill. An AMA spokesman says the bill raises a possibility that a fetus has legal rights that would compete with a need to protect a mother's health.

The Reagan Administration has thus far avoided comment on the bill, and there are signs that it wants to avoid becoming embroiled in the controversy. In recent testimony before the Senate judiciary subcommittee, the Department of Health and Human Services deliberately downplayed statistics showing a sharp decline in mortality from abortion since its legalization in 1973.

These and other data showing that abortion poses less health risk than childbirth were scheduled for presentation on 20 May by Ward Cates, chief of the abortion surveillance branch of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Cates was told at the last minute that his boss, Carl Tyler, head of CDC's family planning division, would present the testimony in abbreviated fashion instead. Cates was told that CDC was acting on direct orders from the office of HHS Secretary Richard Schweiker, an avowed foe of abortion.

The statistics that made the department uneasy showed, among other things, that the abortion rate has not increased since its legalization—that legal abortions have merely substituted for previously illegal ones. Cates's testimony also claimed that legalized abortion policies have provided teenagers with alternatives to entering high-risk marriages, and that outpatient abortion services provide a model for convenient, low-cost services related to family planning and sex.

Science was unable to get an ex-