

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.

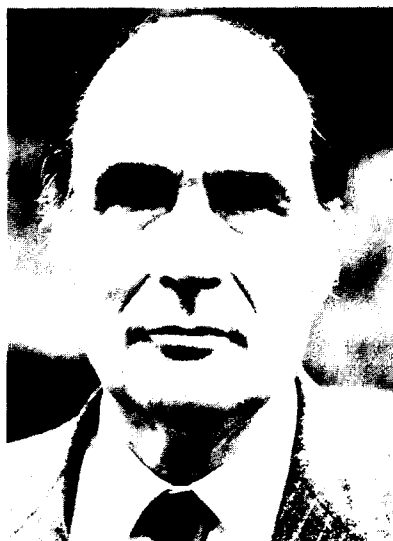
The freeze is consistent with a promise in the campaign platform of Mitterand's Socialist Party to complete reactors now being built but not to make major decisions about the inherited, highly ambitious nuclear power program (*Science*, 22 August 1980, p. 884) until after a national debate on energy.

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-mega-watt 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-

planation from HHS for its decision on the testimony and thus could not determine if it was caused by Schweiker's opposition to the message or merely by a desire to avoid making CDC, a fact-gathering agency, a target for politicians. Cates says he hopes to publish his testimony in a scientific journal.—**R. Jeffrey Smith**

World Bank Puts Off Energy Lending Plans

The executive directors of the World Bank have bowed to pressure from the Reagan Administration by postponing an expansion of the Bank's lending for energy development in the Third World. The decision, taken at a meeting on 4 June, will give the Administration more time to determine whether to support such a move.

The Bank already intends to lend about \$13 billion for energy projects over the next 5 years, but it believes that at least an additional \$12 billion will be needed to help developing countries reduce their dependence on imported oil. Bank officials have been drafting plans to establish a separate affiliate to fund energy projects, but the Reagan Administration said in February that it could not support such a step at that time (*Science*, 3 April, p. 21). As part of an internal review of U.S. policies for the World Bank and other multilateral lending institutions, the Administration is now trying to decide whether it should support any expansion of the Bank's current energy lending plans.

The review, which is being headed by the Treasury Department, will not be completed for several weeks. According to Administration sources, there is at present a divergence of opinions, with officials from the State Department arguing in favor of an expanded Bank lending program while officials from the Treasury Department and the Office of Management and Budget are opposed.

Meanwhile, the Bank's president-elect, A. W. Clausen, has already gone on record in support not only of expanding the World Bank's energy programs but of setting up a separate energy affiliate as well. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Clausen



A. W. Clausen

said he is "gung-ho for energy." He said that he will "very carefully analyze the arguments raised against an energy affiliate, and if there is some other way to do it, O.K. But the main idea is to get the energy." Clausen, who was formerly chief executive officer of the Bank of America, takes over at the World Bank on 1 July.

—**Colin Norman**

FDA Plans Action on Sodium in Foods

Arthur Hayes, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, says that one of his first priorities is to find a way to lower the sodium content of processed foods. Hayes, who formerly directed the hypertension clinic at Hershey Medical Center (*Science*, 17 April, p. 310), says he will soon begin meeting with industry representatives to seek voluntary reductions.

Hayes made the comments at a recent meeting of the Food and Drug Law Institute to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the enactment of the Food and Drugs Act. Earlier, Richard Schweiker, Secretary of Health and Human Services, also said he is interested "in bringing more information about sodium to the attention of the public, especially the 60 million Americans who have or are at risk for hypertension."

Schweiker also conveyed his ap-

proval of pending legislation to extend a moratorium on the ban on saccharin, as well as legislation to extend the patent life of new drugs, an issue high on the pharmaceutical industry's agenda. Schweiker said he had asked Hayes to find ways of accelerating the drug review process and tearing down "unnecessary government imposed barriers" to new innovations.

Hayes said he planned to review all existing FDA regulations, to upgrade FDA's deteriorating animal testing laboratories, and to continue the effort of his predecessors to consolidate FDA's offices at a single site in the Washington suburbs.

—**R. Jeffrey Smith**

It Is Illegal to Say That One Is Sane

Last December, Alexei Nikitin, a Ukrainian mining engineer, approached Western newspaper correspondents with a tale of unsafe working conditions in Soviet mines. Soviet authorities promptly arrested him and sent him to a psychiatric hospital, where he had previously been interned with a diagnosis of "psychopathological—simple form," a rubric often used to describe simple dissent.

Anatoly Koryagin, a psychiatrist who has examined a number of imprisoned Soviet dissidents, interviewed Nikitin and judged him "totally healthy." For making this assessment, which he later conveyed to Western journalists, Koryagin, 42, was sentenced last week to a maximum term of 7 years in prison and 5 years of internal exile.

He is the last person connected with the Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes to be arrested or forced to leave the country. Each of the commission's five members has been sentenced to a long prison term, rendering it largely ineffectual. Koryagin's arrest was the subject of appeals by the National Academy of Sciences committee on human rights, the American Psychological Association, and Amnesty International. His trial lasted 3 days and the official charge was anti-Soviet agitation.

—**R. Jeffrey Smith**