

A Rescue Mission for an Agency in Distress

A former top official at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has formed a coalition called "Save EPA" to rescue the agency from demolition by the Reagan Administration. William Drayton, assistant administrator for planning and management during the Carter presidency, says the group will disseminate information about EPA's budget and reorganization to the press and members of environmental organizations in hopes that they will be stirred to action.

"The next 6 months are critical," Drayton warns. If EPA administrator Anne M. Gorsuch is not reined in now, he says, the agency's budget and number of personnel will be sliced in half by June. He predicts that if such cuts are made, it would take the research work at EPA at least a decade to recover because new staff would have to be hired and ongoing studies would be interrupted. The agency has already shrunk by 1000 employees—or one-fifth of the staff—since Gorsuch took over.

Save EPA is a loosely organized coalition that depends mainly on volunteer work. It is run on a shoestring budget that is mainly supported by Drayton's own money plus contributions from environmental groups and other individuals. Organizations such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Audubon Society, and the National Wildlife Federation, together with individuals such as Russell Train, head of the World Wildlife Fund, and past and present EPA staffers have all cooperated with Save EPA in one way or another. They trade information on the upcoming fiscal 1983 budget, monitor the reorganization plans, and notify local members of changes.

Drayton is counting on the public to protest cuts at EPA once it learns how dim the future looks for the agency. "I have an old-fashioned belief that people are intelligent. The polls say that they want to be able to see across the street. They want clean air. They don't want to be exposed to toxic substances. This Administration does not have a friendly agenda for EPA. I think people will be furious about that."

An EPA spokesman says that Save

EPA would have little effect on the Administration's plans. "Oh, we'll listen to them just like we do anyone else," says Byron Nelson. "But they won't have any direct effect other than the press they generate."

—*Marjorie Sun*

Scientists Start Fund to Fight Antivivisectionists

A group of neuroscientists, alarmed at the growing aggressiveness of the animal rights movement, is forming a legal defense fund for researchers whose work with animals makes them the target of animal welfare activists.

The president and chief organizer is Edward E. Coons, Jr., a physiological psychologist at New York University. Coons has spent the past 3 months working on the problems of Edward Taub, the psychologist who in November was convicted for neglect of his monkeys (*Science*, 11 December 1981, p. 1218). Coons and other supporters of Taub, including Neal Miller of Rockefeller University and Vernon Mountcastle of Johns Hopkins University, believe that Taub was set up by animal activists and that his case amounts to a grave miscarriage of justice. They also believe the National Institutes of Health (NIH) felt compelled to suspend his research grant for purely political reasons.

(Taub's monkeys are still in residence at NIH's animal facilities; his grant is still in suspension. His appeal is not scheduled to be heard in court until spring.)

The Biomedical Research Defense Fund, as the new entity is called, has so far collected about \$2500 for the purpose of helping Taub cover his legal expenses. The group is also following with interest a Connecticut case, in which an organization called Friends of Animals has sued the Department of Agriculture in an effort to stop the United States Surgical Corporation from using dogs to test its surgical staple guns.

Coons says he and his colleagues are "terribly concerned" about the animal rights movement and believe it poses "considerable danger to the freedom of research," particularly basic behavioral and physiological research.—*Constance Holden*

Formaldehyde Insulation Ban Overturned

A state ban on the use of foam insulation made from urea formaldehyde was overturned recently by a Massachusetts judge. The ruling may take on national significance because the Consumer Product Safety Commission is scheduled to vote on 8 February on whether to impose a nationwide ban on formaldehyde insulation.

Superior Court Judge John T. Ronan ruled on 18 January that the state health commissioner failed to compare levels of formaldehyde in homes with the insulation to those without before the ban went into effect in November 1980. In addition, the commissioner did not clearly establish that the insulation was the source of higher formaldehyde levels. The compound is also released from resin products such as plywood, particle board, and carpeting.

The judge said the state also failed to present sufficient evidence that a significant number of people would suffer an appreciable risk from exposure to formaldehyde. Furthermore, it did not specify a threshold level at which a consumer could safely be exposed. The judge wrote, "... [f]or an agency to promulgate administrative regulations rooted in ignorance, leaving the important issues of causal connection and contribution and incident rates unanswered, and indeed, even unexplored, is to perform its agency function in an irresponsible and totally arbitrary manner."

State assistant attorney general Bruce E. Mohl said in an interview that the state health commissioner has a different interpretation of the statutes and the kind of evidence needed before a ban is ordered. He noted that the state is likely to appeal.

Members of the formaldehyde industry were elated at the ruling. "We are extremely gratified. The court has ruled decisively in our favor," said R. Josh Lanier, head of the National Insulation Certification Institute.

The members of the Consumer Product Safety Commission may or may not be swayed by the Massachusetts ruling, an agency official said. Since the state ban was ordered in 1980, the evidence that formaldehyde

is a health risk has mounted. For example, it is now clear that the compound is an animal carcinogen and many scientists believe it is a potential human carcinogen. Attorneys for Massachusetts were barred from presenting this new data at the trial because it was ruled irrelevant to the state's decision two years ago.

—**Marjorie Sun**

Super Phénix Unscathed in Rocket Attack

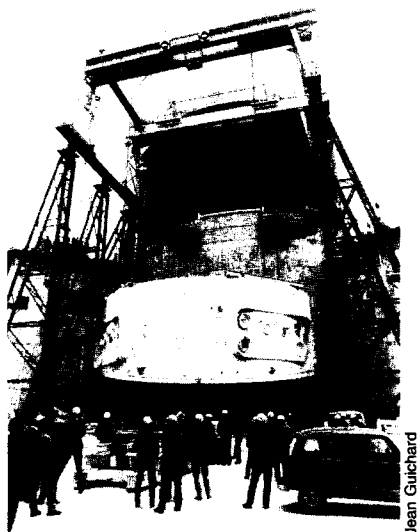
French detectives have launched a manhunt near Lyon in southeastern France to find the person who fired five rockets at the jewel of the nuclear energy program, the sodium-cooled plutonium breeder reactor known as the Super Phénix. The shots were fired at the reactor, still under construction at Creys-Malville, from a point across the Rhone River at around midnight on 18 January.

According to a spokesman for the French nuclear agency in Washington, Bertrand Barré, the police still have no suspect and few clues. One man, who would not identify himself except to say he represented a group called the Pacifist and Ecologist Committee, telephoned a news agency to claim responsibility. He said the damage would "cause an enormous delay in the construction of the plant, which was our objective. We were not trying to be spectacular for the sake of it, but to delay the building of this monstrous object and make people think—so that the nuclear debate will start again in France."

When the Mitterrand administration came into office in May 1981, the government's nuclear construction program was put on hold for a review lasting several months. Work has resumed now on most reactors.

Barré says the attack did little damage to the Super Phénix, which will be the world's first large-scale plutonium breeder. There will be no delay in the operating schedule, he says. Full power (1200 megawatts) testing is supposed to begin late in 1983 and regular operation should start in 1984.

The rockets and launcher were of Russian design, intended for use against armored tanks. According to French authorities, the launcher was a



Super Phénix before the attack

type made by the Soviet Union in the early 1960's, and was in mint condition. The shell casings bore Cyrillic characters, suggesting they were Russian-made.

The effect of this type of rocket, Barré says, is like that of a torch—good for penetrating steel but ineffective against concrete. Two shots hit the wall of the steam generator building; one hit the main reactor building; one hit a metal crane outside the building; and one went through an opening in the side of the reactor building, hitting a crane inside. Apparently all five were aimed at this opening, through which the reactor vessel was being installed. The reactor, already in place, was not damaged. There was no risk of radiation escape, for the fuel had not been delivered. However, the rockets could have touched off an intense fire had they hit the supply of sodium stored at the site. A rocket fell near one worker, but did not injure him.

Nothing is known about the person or group claiming responsibility. French environmentalist organizations have denounced the attack.

The French government has not taken any measures to increase police protection around nuclear plants. Barré speculates that a purpose of the attack may have been to force the government to step up security at this and other plants. "The internal logic of terrorist strategy," he says, "is to create a situation in which more police are required—and then to say that nuclear power is not compatible with democracy." —**Elliot Marshall**

Math Meeting in Poland Questioned

The military crackdown in Poland has thrown into confusion plans for a major international scientific meeting. The International Congress of Mathematicians, an event held every 4 years at which the prestigious Fields Medals are awarded, is scheduled to take place in Warsaw at the end of August. It may not be possible to hold an international meeting in Poland this year, however, and some mathematicians are pushing for a change of venue.

George D. Mostow of Yale University, who is chairman of the U.S. National Committee for Mathematics and who selects the head of the U.S. delegation to the congress' general assembly, explains that mathematicians are in a quandary about what to do. "So far, there are no plans in place for holding the congress at an alternate location. There are divided feelings on planning an alternative," he says. Some mathematicians want to go ahead and meet in some country other than Poland. Others believe that Polish mathematicians should be consulted about the matter. According to Ronald L. Graham of Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey, who is a member of the U.S. National Committee for Mathematics, a number of U.S. mathematicians feel that the congress could provide a rare opportunity for Polish mathematicians to meet with colleagues from other countries. Lennard Carleson of the Mittag Leffler Institute in Sweden, who is president of the international congress, hopes to visit Poland and assess the feasibility of holding the meeting there, Mostow says.

Of course, if mathematicians wait too long, they may not be able to find an alternate site to house the 5000 or so persons who plan to attend the meeting. If that happens, says Mostow, "I think there would be a very strong sentiment to publish the proceedings even if there is no meeting." The question of where to hold the congress, Mostow concludes, "is an issue that is of great concern to the mathematics community and people are wondering about it. But it is too early to say what will happen."

—**Gina Kolata**