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NUCLEAR ENERGY : Running out of steam

The nine European Community countries are now expected to achieve only half of the 1985 objective in nuclear energy they set for themselves in 1974. Current output is near 29 billion watts and nuclear power stations under construction will account for another 40 billion watts. But in 1974 the Nine set themselves a target of 160 billion watts by 1985. As of now, however, total production will probably not go beyond 70 or 80 billion watts.

What's the reason for this gap? One reason is that a drop in demand for energy has led to a slowdown of nuclear energy programmes in a number of European countries. There is also the growing pressure of public opinion to limit the uses of nuclear energy.

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Eight European workers out of 10 feel their job is relatively interesting. Seven out of 10 think their talents are put to good use. And 6 out of 10 say they are earning a good living. Is this the best of all possible worlds in Europe?

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TRANSPORTATION : The European Express

Transportation provides 6 percent of the gross internal product of the European Community, a larger share than agriculture. It also absorbs 40 percent of government investments, which means severe financing difficulties. The European Community sees these and other factors as good reasons for Community financial aid to the transportation sector. The transportation networks inside the Community are also becoming more and more interdependent. What's more, since the 1960s these links between member states have developed at a faster pace than national connections.

Nevertheless, some of these transportation connections that are important for the social and economic development of the Community have not received a high priority from the member governments. As a result, the Community is proposing to provide its own partial financing for such projects.

The following is a list of projects which it feels should get first consideration:

- Improvement of international rail connections between major centres:
 - Improvement of the Brussels-Cologne line to increase the speed of the train.
 - Improvement of the Bologna-Bremen line.
 - Improvement of the Utrecht-Cologne-Frankfort line.
 - Improvement of the Amsterdam-Brussels-Luxemburg-Strasbourg line.
- Projects to help badly-served regions:
 - Improvement of rail and road connections between Dublin-Belfast-Londonderry and Dublin-Cork/Galway.
 - Improvement of the road connections with ports in the east of England.
- Connections with the new member states
 - EEC-Greece connection by the trans-Austrian motorway.
 - Improvement of the road connections between France and Spain.
- Projects designed to overcome natural obstacles
 - English Channel crossing: fixed connection and access means.
 - German-Danish link by the Fehmarn bridge and improvement of the means of access.
 - Crossing of the Straits of Messina.
 - Construction of a new Alpine rail tunnel line and a new sorting centre at Domodossola, Italy.
- Link-ups between existing networks
 - The Rhine-Rhone Canal, the Thionville-Luxemburg-Trier autoroute, and the enlarging of the Class IV canals between Belgium and France.

If the proposals by the European Commissions are accepted by the Council of Ministers, it would mark the start of a true joint transportation policy, something lacking up to now.

ECONOMICS : Consuming more with the same income...

In 1980, unemployment will probably worsen in the European Community, according to forecasts by the European Commission. The percentage of jobless in the working population will rise to 6.2 percent, up from 5.6 percent this year. The increase in consumer prices will amount to some 9 percent, of which 2 to 2.5 percent will be caused by the rise in energy prices alone. There is also little optimism about economic growth, which the European Commission predicts will average a rate of 2 percent for next year in contrast to 1978, which was slightly better than 3 percent.

To face this bleak future, the European Commission believes that households should somewhat reduce their savings in order to boost consumer demand. The annual economic report of the Commission also recommends that industry and labour limit the impact of higher energy prices on salaries as much as possible. In short, to resolve the current economic crisis, the squaring of the circle will have to be accomplished so that consumers can spend more without earning more.

RESEARCH : Under the weather

The weather doesn't just control moods, it can also seriously affect supplies of water, energy and foodstuffs. However, not only do we know very little about the mechanics and behaviour of climate; mankind itself can also interfere by causing pollution that can provoke major weather changes.

Aware of these problems, the European Commission has recommended to the Council of Ministers that subsidies be provided for a programme of research in climatology to cover a period of five years beginning on January 1, 1980. The funds proposed amount to £ 5.3 million. The goal of this programme, which non-Community countries could join later, would be primarily to improve computer models to simulate weather patterns and to help predict these quickly and effectively on a Community scale.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS - DATA PROCESSING : Europe's trump cards

Europe is setting out for itself a challenging objective of supplying one-third of the world market in advanced electronics by 1990. What at first seems an enormous task should be possible because Europe's trump cards are powerful ones.

- the population of the European Community market is as large as the American market.
- government purchases are very high, accounting for 35 percent of world computer sales.
- the larger European countries have established national development programmes to encourage the expansion of this new technology.

These are the trump cards. But the weaknesses are also evident. European production capacity isn't keeping pace with its own needs. To determine the best strategy, there are proposals that would gather manufacturers, governments and various European institutions to discuss the problems. Participants will have to consider some basic approaches.

These include:

- for telecommunications, the standardisation of major European equipment characteristics and the stepped-up production of space satellites.
- for computers, the establishment of networks of interconnections and the stimulation of production of European models.
- for components, the initiation of European research and development programmes.
- finally, an increase in computerised data banks.

In the background is the thorny problem of eliminating large numbers of traditional jobs through automation.

To avoid massive upheavals in banks, insurance companies and administrations, plans should be made to organise a dialogue between trade unions, manufacturers and public authorities. To provide concrete proposals, this dialogue should be based on a number of pilot programmes in industries that will be affected by this fundamental change.

SOCIAL : The war on poverty

One of the main objectives of the European Community is to improve the standard of living of its population. For many years, it was generally believed that this goal was easily realisable. But the current economic crisis has quite naturally seriously undermined this optimism and laid bare the fact that poverty is more than ever a permanent reality in large segments of the population.

The condition of poverty becomes more apparent if a definition contained in a recent European Commission report is used: "... individuals or families may be considered in general to be in poverty when they have a command of resources so deficient that they are excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities of the Member State in which they live."

To better understand and more effectively combat the problem, the European Community, as part of its social action programme, has conducted some 25 pilot projects with the collaboration of member countries. These projects in the war on poverty are extremely diversified and are being financed for the five-year period from the end of 1975 to the end of 1980. Because they are limited and temporary, they will not bring a solution to the overall problem of poverty.

Their usefulness, however, is to provide guidelines that can be used to define a better strategy in the struggle against poverty. But these programmes will only have a concrete impact when the governments of the European Community really use the results of the studies and devote on a long-term basis much more substantial resources than those contained in the pilot projects themselves.

These findings are part of the "Second Report of the European Programme of Pilot Schemes and Studies to combat poverty", recently released by the European Commission. The report contains summaries of the up-to-date development of the 25 projects conducted.

EUROPE, A WORKERS' PARADISE

Even if most people aren't exactly wild about their jobs, a recent survey conducted throughout Europe revealed that surprisingly enough most seemed satisfied with the way they earned a living.

Nearly eight out of ten persons questioned throughout the nine European Common Market countries couldn't bring themselves to say that their work was uninteresting. Six out of ten said they were paid well. And six in ten also displayed enough pride in their occupation to say they thought others showed sufficient respect for the work they performed.

But there were also the usual gripes from about half of these European workers who claimed they were exhausted at the end of the working day. And to make things worse, only one-third among them felt they had a chance to have a promotion.

Both men and women seemed to feel the same way about their work, although women tended to be somewhat more negative about the physical strain of work and about the prospects for a promotion. The latter is easily understandable since, for most women, the eight hours of work are added onto three to five hours of domestic duties or caring for a child. It's often this additional burden that spoils their chances for a promotion by discouraging improvement through night courses or examinations. In addition, there is the reluctance of many employers to entrust women with more responsible jobs because they may interrupt their careers for childbearing, or simply because they're women.

Job satisfaction also seems to be related to the country of origin and also to latitudes, with Northern Europeans feeling more contented than their southern counterparts. Germans are the quickest to say they find their jobs interesting and that they feel well-thought-of. The Dutch are the first in feeling that their capabilities are best used, and they're also the least likely to complain about being worn out at the end of the day. Luxemburgers are the most optimistic about a promotion and in feeling that they earn a good living.

The French and the Italians, however, see their work in a different light. It may be a matter of climate, but it may also be connected with the intensity of their trade union or political involvement. There's even more difference from one occupation to the next. Among men, the most satisfied are top-level supervisors, professionals, and then those in business, trade or skilled crafts. Farmers are a little more satisfied than clerical personnel, middle-echelon managers and civil servants. Life seems the bleakest for unskilled workers. Among women, the least-satisfied are also the unskilled, but their sentiment is nearly matched by women in commerce or the crafts. Women on the farm are slightly less disappointed. The most fulfilled are those in the professions, followed by the top-level supervisors, clerical personnel, middle-level supervisors and civil servants.

Motivation is, of course, an important factor. Professionals and managers are the most interested in their work and the most satisfied with their pay and their prestige. Farmers are the most convinced that their capabilities are the best used, but they are also the most depressed about their prestige. Unskilled workers are at the bottom of the list in their interest in their work and feeling they are being put to the best use.

Of course these sentiments are the results of a public opinion poll, which can exaggerate the response by just asking people to express their feelings. Perhaps the best way to judge is to take ten persons at random around you and ask how many are satisfied. These statistics are drawn from "Men and Women of Europe in 1978. Comparative attitudes on some problems of society," a study conducted at the request of the European Commission.