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Development of Scientific Cooperation in Europe

Hail the day ... On 28 October the six countries' Ministers for Science are to meet at Luxembourg to consider the future development of scientific cooperation in the Community.

Two files will be waiting for them, one of which concerns the "AIGRAIN REPORT", prepared by a group of experts from the member countries who have been attending meetings with the Commission for some months and have drawn up a report on the cooperative policies the Six ought to pursue jointly with non-member countries in seven priority fields (information science, telecommunications, abatement of nuisances, meteorology, oceanography, new means of transport, metallurgy). The "Aigrain Report" (see "Research and Technology" No. 21) was passed by the Ministers last 30 June to a group of high-ranking officials who carefully reviewed it before proposing concrete action to the Ministers on a certain number of items, with, in most cases, collaboration by non-member countries. In spite of the close curtain of secrecy the experts and high officials have tried to maintain round their work, the inevitable leakages give grounds to hope that on 28 October the Council of Ministers will at last be able to take a firm decision to propose to certain non-member countries - notably to countries seeking admission, and in the first place Great Britain - collaboration in a number of sectors,

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more especially information science, metallurgy, nuisance abatement and meteorology.

Again according to leaked information, the situation regarding the second file the Ministers are to consider, that of EURATOM, looks considerably less promising. Ever since Euratom's second five-year research programme terminated on 31 December 1967, the Commission has been vainly trying to get the Ministers to approve a new multiannual programme. First 1968 and then 1969 were got through on interim programmes, while a solution to the problem was deferred from year to year and even from month to month. One can imagine the effects of that indecision on the Joint Research Centre's 2700-odd scientists and technicians who have been waiting for more than two years to hear what fate finally awaits them.

The Commission's proposals concerning Euratom's future activities (see "Research and Technology" No. 15) highlight the industrial follow-up of nuclear research, more closely coordinated action on reactor development, and a certain number of fundamental or public-service research projects which it would obviously pay the six countries to carry out jointly. For the first time, the Commission also proposes that part of the potential available at the Joint Research Centre be redirected to non-nuclear activities, in three fields where joint action is particularly urgent - nuisance abatement, information science and an industrial standards bureau.

Over and above the often technical nature of the decisions which the Ministers of the six countries have to take, THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS SET A POLITICAL PROBLEM: are the Community States willing, or are they not, to work together to build up a vigorous, competitive nuclear industry, the objective they subscribed to in 1957 when they signed the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community? Today, when Europe's "technology gap" has become a byword, are they content or will they refuse to let one of the means they jointly created to narrow that gap, namely, the Joint Research Centre, fall into decay?

Above all, can a Member State refuse to participate in one of the common policies that interests it less than the others, without betraying the very spirit of the Community? And is it not then liable to find its partners adopting the same attitude in other sectors, so that the Community will be carved up sector by sector?

One hopes against hope for an AWAKENING, WHICH CAN ONLY BE POLITICAL. But the question is, is the political climate right for it?

The President of the Council of Ministers is going on a whistle-stop tour of the capitals to try and bring his colleagues to agree to a sensible compromise. If his attempt should fail, the Commission would have to add the "Euratom problem" to the "bundle" of unsolved problems it proposes to negotiate with the six governments before the year is out.

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To put the sums involved into perspective, it should be recalled that the research budget proposed by the Commission represents 6.8% of the expenditure the Member States devote to nuclear research (see "Research and Technology" No. 25). Furthermore, this budget (approximately 73 million dollars for 1970) amounts to only 40% of the total budget of the Community's institutions and about 15% of the appropriations allotted in 1968 to the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund alone.