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Among them is the demographic trend which even before 1970 had shown that 30% of the population of France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries was concentrated in 9% of the available land area. Further, in the area of greatest population concentration, the birth rate was found to be more than double that of the outlying regions. The result of this trend could be to entrench the so-called Golden Triangle, the industrial area that extends from the Midlands of England to the Gulf of Genoa. Any environmental policy is inevitably linked to balanced development. But this is not taking place, and, indeed, the Community's agricultural policy is actually encouraging people off the land into the industrial conurbations.

Under the liberal capitalist economic systems of the Nine, new industries are usually attracted to the main market areas, thus strengthening the tendencies towards pollution that have been created by a century's unplanned search for industrial prosperity. In the strictest terms, then, a successful Community environment policy demands some control over the disposition of economic activity. But there is no power to create such a system of control, nor much evidence of any desire to create it. It would involve the emergence of a supranational state which, while it might be the aim of the European integrationists, is scarcely a realistic political concept for the time being. Community environment policy is likely to remain something of a patchwork while the politicians strive to come to terms with what the Community's Altiero Spinelli once called "a spectrum of complex interdisciplinary problems, whose impact, interconnection and consequences are frequently not completely known as yet." There is the additional problem that the environment as such is not mentioned in the Treaty of Rome and that, freed from the legal requirements of common action, the member states' movements on an integrated policy will be a direct reflection of their somewhat haphazard desire to move closer together politically.

It is against this background that the Community has been formulating and enacting a limited environment policy. The Community was a relative late-comer to the field. It was not until 1971 that the Commission established a special unit to deal with policy, and it was only at the Community summit meeting of October 1972 that their efforts received much political recognition. A detailed action programme was ordered for presentation in the middle of 1973. This programme was adopted later and ran until the end of 1975. Now a further programme to cover the next five years, with revision after

Can Europe clean itself up?

Despite the rhetoric that bursts forth when principles of European Economic Community action are outlined, environment policy remains something of a backward region. Progress towards common action at Community level has been tardy, not through a lack of ideas but a paucity of decisions. Paul Cheeseright reports.

IN THE EEC, environment is a policy looking for an executor. Yet opinion polls would suggest that a more vigorous approach by the Community's decision-making arm, the Council of Ministers, would not be lacking in some sort of popular acclaim. Nearly 10,000 people questioned throughout the Community in the middle of last year were asked to list the most important problems facing the Community. Second on the list of five major concerns came nature conservancy, and most of the interviewees favoured European action to deal with all of the problems.

In fact, a vast amount of work into the problems and techniques of environmental control is proceeding within the Community. The great problem, however, is that most of it is uncoordinated, and at Brussels there is simply inadequate information to gain a coherent picture. For this reason, it was agreed towards the end of last year that the European Commission, the ideas centre and civil service section of the Community, should pull together an inventory of sources of information on the environment. The data would be supplied by the nine member states and include independent research exercises. The information supplied would be processed in such a way as to be compatible with similar groundwork being undertaken for the UN international reference system on the environment.

This measure extends the interchange of information that was begun in 1973 when the Community took its first halting steps towards harmonising national legislation on the environ-

ment. When one state desires to take action in an area where the Commission has not presented proposals, the measure can only come into effect six months after the Commission has been informed and only if the Commission has presented no proposals to the Council. Under an agreement of March 1973, the Commission is in any case informed of draft laws, regulations or administrative provisions. In the first two years after the agreement it was informed by the member states of 22 laws or regulations, 67 draft provisions and six international agreements, the greater part coming from Denmark, France and Germany.

The existence of such mechanisms acts as a check on the use of environmental policy in a purely chauvinistic sense, and is an acceptance of the principle that environmental policy applied in any determined fashion is a nonsense when conceived in a purely national framework. Indeed, one of the lessons of the international conference at Stockholm in June 1972 was that in the absence of any international organisation to supervise the improvement of the European environment, only the Community can execute a policy that transcends national frontiers. Yet the Community has only limited powers, and over the next decade it seems likely that any steps taken will work towards the mitigation of problems rather than their cure or outright prevention. This is not to say that water will not become purer or the air cleaner, but it is to say that there are certain forces at work within Europe that will not be pushed aside.

2½ years, is under consideration.

The main thrust of the Community's first programme covered three broad areas. In the first place the aim was to prevent or reduce pollution; the second aim was to improve the environment generally and then, finally, to push forward Community involvement in the framework of international action on the environment. Within these general areas, the Community adopted the principle that "the polluter pays". This may turn out to be something of a misnomer, for the real fact is that the consumer pays. Where factories or agencies take steps to minimise their pollution of the environment, it is inevitable that this will be reflected in the prices charged for the products created. In addition, governments are using taxpayers' money to aid companies introducing anti-pollutant measures. The Community has since the end of 1974 had a general rule as to the apportionment of costs and the role of the public sector in providing aids for anti-pollutant measures. But this measure is less concerned with safeguarding public money than preventing the companies of one country gaining a competitive advantage over those of another.

The Community has also adopted a set of rather obvious principles for the administration of environment policy. There are eight in all, aimed above all at the co-ordination of national programmes. The use of natural resources which damage the ecological balance should be avoided, environmental damage should be prevented rather than corrected afterwards, technical progress must include efforts to protect the environment, the polluter should pay, the environment will be taken into consideration at an early stage of technical planning, activities in one country should not damage another and there should be nothing to impede the operation of the common market. The principles are banal, but significant in the European context mainly because they had not been enunciated before.

At the Community level, numerous research programmes have been set moving and plans for a European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions have been laid so that the Foundation should start working early this year. The Council has also adopted a resolution on the desirable quality of surface waters required for drinking and a recommendation on the storage and treatment of waste oil, and has adopted the Paris Convention for the prevention of marine pollution from land-based sources. At the end of 1975, the Council agreed that the Commission should represent the Community in international negotiations aimed at providing a basis on which it will be

possible to keep the Mediterranean cleared of pollution emanating from the land. In this case, the Commission's mandate is an extension of the agreement that was reached at the Paris Convention, which covered the North-East Atlantic. These examples give a flavour of the breadth of the work that is being undertaken at the Community level, although it can be argued cogently that the effort is minimal when related to the scale of the problems to be solved and the power of the Community when acting in a united fashion to solve them.

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But this really points up the difficulties that the Community is facing. Given a problem it is possible to suggest a scientific counteraction. But Community problems are not dealt with according to such simple terms. In the first place, there might be, and often is, argument about the scientific response to the problems because the geographical nature of the Community is so varied. In the second place, any scientific response to a problem has to be consistent with the overriding economic aims of the Community. Of course, the Community is concerned with economic growth, but the difficulty goes deeper than that into the existence of the common market. It is a dominant principle that the common market should not be endangered, that there should be free traffic in goods and that no company or country should have an advantage over another, created by the Community rules.

Two incidents in recent months provide evidence of the dilemma created by these circumstances in the Community. One instance remains unsolved. The other has been widened to embrace a compromise that might embrace the environmental end, while taking into account the nationally-based scientific and economic means.

The first relates to the content of lead in petrol, a subject which the Community has broached but has never been able to follow through because of the opposing national attitudes and interests. At the beginning of the year the West German Government was due to introduce a new regime governing the extent of lead permitted. In introducing stricter measures in the interests of curbing air pollution, the Germans have pursued a policy that is further advanced than that of other Community states. On January 1, the Germans reduced the legal lead content in petrol to 0.15 grams per litre from

0.4 grams. Precisely because the German regulations will be stepping outside the commercially accepted norms, the Commission has received complaints from a group of German oil companies and a number of Dutch firms that, as they are unable to meet the 0.15 grams regulations, they are being forced out of the market. Therefore, the companies argue, the regulation is an infringement of the principles of the common market and free competition. The case remains unresolved.

The second instance concerns the emission of toxic waste into the aquatic environment. It was the subject of bitter dispute between Britain and the other eight members of the Community at a Council meeting in October. A compromise was reached in December. Broadly the eight members wanted discharge controls for pollutants like cadmium, mercury, organohalogenic, organophosphoric and organotitanic composites, and a list of others making up a so-called black list. Britain, on the other hand, argued that there should be an observance of quality control objectives—in other words, there should be no control on discharge where it could be indicated that the discharge did not affect the immediate environment. The eight contended that unless there was a uniform emission standard there would be distortion of economic competition. The British rejoinder was that this was nonsense and that there should be recognition that geographic factors were different in the varied parts of the Community. Britain had short rivers, a long shoreline and not many factories on the rivers. The compromise finally agreed was that emission standards should be used but there could be exceptions where quality objectives may be used.

While the Community, it may be argued, lost a chance, because of British intransigence, to move forward into the area of positive controls, it came face to face with the fact that environmental policy will have to be flexible in the future. The conditions in the north of Scotland are not the same as those in Sicily. If fish are not given a chance to live in the Rhine, they are breeding more heavily in the Thames. But beyond this, the flexibility of the approach to aquatic pollution is probably more in keeping with the political realities of 1975-6.

In a general sense, the environmental lobby is not as strong as it was in 1972-3, except insofar as it can bring its power to bear on local issues of immediate importance. And even if it was, it would not necessarily make much difference. Environmental policy in the Community has less to do with science and more to do with politics and economics. □