

It is certain that without intensive development of nuclear power, the 'official forecast' of 370×10^9 kWh of electricity by 1985 will not be reached, by far. But is this a forecast or a policy statement? Less than half of 370×10^9 kWh of electricity was produced in 1975, and less than one-tenth of that figure in 1950. Ecologists do not fail to remark that Eurodif, Europe's first uranium enrichment plant, at Tricastin, is itself expected to consume some 30×10^9 kWh a year, which is almost as much as the total electrical energy output in 1950. And they also argue that a less spectacular increase in energy production may not mean, as hawks have hinted, a return to the Middle Ages.

Marching for other issues

But nuclear power is not the 'ecologists' only concern. On 15 August, protesters marched on the Larzac plateau, in the southern part of the Massif Central, against the Army's proposed take-over of more than 10,000 ha of land for training and testing. The expansion was planned in 1970 and would have been completed last year, were it not for the deter-

mined opposition of local farmers, who have succeeded in mustering considerable support. In six years of stubborn but largely peaceful opposition, the farmers have become well organised and have learned many tricks. For example, they published a study of cattle and sheep farming in conjunction with an effective public relations operation which included releasing a flock of sheep under the Eiffel tower in Paris; on another occasion they organised a symbolic harvest for the Third World which opened a debate on malnutrition.

The success of the Larzac farmers, who have joined the loose ranks of *les écologistes*, is measured by the fact that the Army has not been able to acquire half of the land it wanted, and that sheep are still squatting on some of the Army-owned land in virtue of ancient pasture rights. Conscious of public opinion, the Army has seldom resorted to expulsion by force.

Les écologistes have also contributed to the sinking of a proposal to construct a super-highway in Paris (the *Radiale Vercingétorix*, named after the famous Gaul warrior), to preserving some sites from urbanisation, to

promoting legislation against water pollution, to imposing controls on the asbestos industry, and to banning the 2-4-5T defoliant. But it should not be forgotten that they are a variegated group, which includes the scientifically inclined, philosophers, and dreamers who yearn for the unpolluted paths cherished by Jean Jacques Rousseau and probably gone forever.

Many of them, and the public, simply do not recognise the boundary between dream and reality because they are not well enough informed. Most, however, appear to have a genuine concern about the environment as a part of society that has changed irreversibly, and believe, as voiced by Giscard d'Estaing at a ministerial council last July, in "the importance of environmental policy as a factor of transformation of society".

As Frenchmen shift to high gear in their semi-permanent political campaigning, the hope is for a reasonable, informative debate. Perhaps then the traditionally central authority, and the inevitably peripheral, but increasingly concerned, citizen will find a common point. □

USA

New DNA draft

An important new factor has been injected into the long-tangled process of developing legislation to control recombinant DNA research in the United States. Colin Norman reports

WHEN members of Congress left Washington for their summer vacations a month ago, two separate versions of legislation to control recombinant DNA experiments were under consideration. In the Senate, a bill developed by Senator Edward Kennedy's Health Subcommittee was awaiting consideration by the full Senate, while in the House, a bill drafted by Representative Paul Roger's Health Subcommittee was pending before the House Commerce Committee. When Congress returns next week, however, a third version will have to be taken into serious consideration, and the already murky legislative outlook has become even more opaque. In fact, there is now a real possibility that Congress will not complete its work on the legislation this year.

The new version has been drafted by Senator Gaylord Nelson, a Democrat from Wisconsin, in response to concerns which a number of scientists have voiced over the Kennedy bill. Nelson

says he plans to offer his bill as an alternative to Kennedy's when the legislation is brought to a vote in the Senate, and the move will guarantee a full-scale debate on some of the key issues.

The Kennedy bill has aroused some concern because it would establish a Presidentially-appointed commission to draft new rules for recombinant DNA experiments, licence facilities and approved experiments, an arrangement which many scientists view as a recipe for bureaucratic delay. The bill would also establish hefty fines for those who violate the rules and it would allow state and local governments to write regulations which would be stricter than the federal controls. The House version would be less restrictive since it would leave most of the responsibility for implementing controls in the hands of local biohazards committees, and it would also place considerable restraint on the authority of local governments to set their own recombinant DNA regulations.

Until recently, the Kennedy bill was moving through the Senate without encountering much Senatorial interest or opposition, and it was scheduled for a vote in the full Senate shortly before the August recess. It was shunted aside by more pressing legislation, however, and it is still pending. The delay has

enabled a number of scientists to step up their lobbying, and their concerns have met with a sympathetic reception in Nelson's office. Nelson's proposed bill is very similar to the House version, though in some respects it is even less restrictive.

Though Nelson has not actively sought supporters for his bill, his office has been receiving a number of calls from other Senate offices expressing interest. In addition, other Senators, including Moynihan of New York, Eagleton of Missouri and Chaffee of Rhode Island, have voiced concern about Kennedy's proposal to establish a new recombinant DNA commission. In short, Nelson's bill is likely to gather considerable support. Nevertheless, if it is put to a vote and it goes down to a heavy defeat, those who support the Kennedy bill would have their hand considerably strengthened when negotiations begin to iron out differences between the House and Senate bills.

Meanwhile, the Roger's bill is not likely to be approved by the Commerce Committee much before the end of September, and it may then be referred to the House Science and Technology Committee. That would delay passage by the House until mid-October at the earliest, which means that there would be little time to reach a compromise with the Senate version before Congress goes into recess before the end of October. □