

with farmers through the Agricultural Advisory Service, failed to appreciate that the chief use of 2,4,5-T is for spraying crops and grassland to get rid of weeds. But even the revised estimate of 50 tonnes a year has had to be doubled to more than 100 tonnes in the light of figures supplied by Customs and Excise of the quantities of the herbicide imported. The broader issue here is that the ministry has for several years resisted complaints that its surveys of the use of pesticides on British farms are adequate.

What, while these questions are being resolved, are the unions (and their members) to do and think? By all accounts, PAC will make a detailed investigation of the specific allegations of damage done to people that have been mentioned by the agricultural workers, but that cannot be a quick job. What the union must do is what it should have been doing all along — to make sure that workers spraying pesticides wear adequate protective clothing.

Mr Clive Jenkins of ASTMS is frying other fish. To his usual preoccupation with the recruitment of members, he appears to have added a wish to back the Health and Safety Executive rather than the Ministry of Agriculture as the arbiter of what pesticides are safe. His inclinations are understandable, for union representation on HSE is laid down by law. In reality, however, both executive and ministry have a finger in the protection of agricultural workers, while HSE is solely responsible for the occupational risks of chemical plants where 2,4,5-T may be manufactured. Even Mr Jenkins is on solid ground when he argues that the executive has dealt ineptly with recent problems. Whatever the strength of these complaints, however, it would be a great misfortune if the use of a herbicide whose value is unquestioned were to be needlessly and prematurely banned simply because the government has made a hash of this affair.

## Nato, France and the neutron bomb

WHILE many parts of France enjoy the spectacle of protests against the building of civil nuclear power stations, there has been hardly a complaint at the French government's announcement that one of its recent nuclear tests was that of a neutron bomb. Just possibly the explanation is that French taxpayers accept the theory of strategic deterrence hook, line and sinker, and are persuaded that French neutron bombs are intended never to be used but that the civil nuclear power stations being built in France are meant to be used, and quickly. It is, however, more probable that the silence which has greeted the announcement of the neutron bomb betokens a general agreement by the French population with the national strategy which has been working out since the mid-1950s. Whatever the explanation of the domestic reaction, opinions appear to have been much changed by the new development. The *Sddeutcher Zeitung* was saying last week, for example, that the neutron bomb means that France is no longer a token nuclear power. What does it all mean?

For the best part of a quarter of a century, France has been the odd man out in European defence. The roots of the present policy appear to go back to Gaullist days, and to the theory advocated by General Jean Gallois that each nation should possess a nuclear striking force somehow commensurate with its own importance to a potential adversary. In reality, they probably have more ancient origins. It is too easily forgotten that the French have long memories, as long perhaps as those of the Irish. The French experience of two world wars is a sufficient justification of the conviction that nation states should in the last resort be masters of the means of their own defence. The painful withdrawal of France from NATO was as much a reflection of this belief as of overt distrust of the assurances in the NATO treaty or of disagreement with NATO strategy. Only this can properly explain how, even with the passage of two decades, France remains on the sidelines, now consulting closely with NATO and behaving as if a full-blown member, but stolidly opposed to rejoining the club.

From this point of view, the development of the neutron bomb is logical enough. So long as France holds to the view that the time may come when the defence of France by Frenchmen (without help from elsewhere) may be necessary, it plainly makes sense that France should be equipped with those nuclear weapons which, at least in theory, could be used tactically in European circumstances without inviting massive retaliation from the other side. Whether, of course, the financial cost of this new investment is worthwhile, only the government of France can judge. Apparently, however, the taxpayers most immediately concerned have no objection. Two years or so from now, which is the soonest the new weapons could be deployed, France may thus be the only nuclear power to risk deploying these new weapons in a theatre where their use makes sense.

The consequences for states on both sides of the German border are not easy to foresee. The most comforting calculation is that France will equip itself with only a modest force of neutron

bombs, one so modest that it could have no decisive influence in a major European conflict. Certainly there has been no protest yet from the East at what the French are planning that compares with the trouble evoked when the United States announced its intention to deploy neutron weapons in Europe more than a year ago. Perhaps the President of France was able to stave off trouble when he met Mr Brezhnev in Warsaw last month, or perhaps the protest is yet to come. Whatever the future, however, it seems inevitable that the latest developments in France will change the regard of other European states for the non-NATO member among them. But this time, unlike the early 1960s, France will tend to be regarded not as the black sheep of Europe but as a symbol of the implicit belief now strengthening in Europe that European responsibility for its own defence is not merely prudent but necessary. The Gallois doctrine, after a long hiatus, is catching on.

So is there a chance that in the years ahead Western Europe as a whole will accept that it must, in the last resort, be responsible for its own defence? And what will be the consequences? The tendencies in this direction which have become apparent in the past few years differ markedly from those which carried France out of NATO twenty years ago. There are few in Western Europe who now doubt the commitment of the United States to European defence. Their anxiety, rather, is that this commitment has been one of the few reliable components of a foreign policy which has as often mystified as reassured. Escapades such as the abortive attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran are worrying for Europeans not so much because of the direct risk of a conflagration, limited though it might well have been, but because they cast doubt on the machinery for consultation within NATO and on the process of policy formation in Washington. These doubts will not go away when the American election has been decided. There are also, however, other forces tending to strengthen European hankerings after a European defence policy. It becomes increasingly anomalous that the European Community has only the most slender means for formulating policy towards the rest of the world — the brief declarations tagged on to communiques such as that issued from Venice a few weeks ago are no substitute for a foreign policy. Moreover, it becomes ever more apparent that Western Europe is evolving its own sense of priorities as to how relationships with the East should be conducted. Chancellor Schmidt's visit to Moscow, sceptically regarded at the outset by the United States, has nevertheless opened the possibility of constructive discussions about medium-range missiles in Europe that could, if by some remote chance they succeeded, be a great boon to the industrialized West and East alike. On the face of things, the French neutron bomb (not yet a weapon) is a gesture of national independence, but it will curiously also help to strengthen Western Europe's growing tendency towards coherence and independence.