

## Netherlands energy policy

## More wind in prospect

Waalre, The Netherlands

AFTER two years, during which some 42,000 people took part in discussions throughout the country, great public debate in the Netherlands on energy policy has finally ended. But for the politicians, for some of whom the debate has conveniently postponed difficult decisions, the argument is only now beginning.

Predictably, the consensus reached in the final report on the debate favours much greater efforts in conservation and greater use of renewable energy. There is a need for the continued use of coal, the report concedes, but it comes out against the idea of any new nuclear power stations.

About Dfl 28 million (£6.3 million) has been spent on the two-year consultation exercise, of which Dfl 8.5 million went on 63 information projects (brochures, exhibitions and so on) and 14 research projects (energy analysis of nuclear power, for instance). A nine-member steering committee was set up in July 1981 under the chairmanship of the then minister for higher education and science policy, M. de Brauw. The committee had a scientific staff of 14 and an administrative staff of 16.

The idea for a public debate on energy came originally from the largest of the Protestant churches, with support from the largest labour union. In 1980, a parliamentary decision was made to embark on the public debate, providing a forum for the heated discussions that followed the abandonment in 1976 of a plan to build three nuclear power plants. Ironically, that plan had been put forward by Ruud Lub-

bers, then minister for economic affairs, who is now prime minister.

The first reactions to the report from the electricity producers are hostile. Public feeling against new power plants using fossil fuels is sustained by the knowledge that at present the Netherlands has a 50 per cent surplus of electricity generating capacity (the total is now 16,000 MW). After 1992, however, new capacity will probably be needed to replace obsolete plant. The report calculates that a "decentralized capacity" of 8,000 MW is feasible — 2,500 MW as wind power and 5,500 MW as combined heat/power in industry and city heating systems. In the past few weeks the electricity producers have been lobbying for

more nuclear power, but to little avail.

In condemning nuclear power, the report stressed the problem of disposal of nuclear waste in a country as densely populated as the Netherlands. Supporters of nuclear power have concentrated on the high cost of electricity in the Netherlands compared with that in neighbouring countries such as West Germany and France. The steering committee claims, however that costs in France are kept artificially low by large government subsidies.

Environmentalist groups have naturally welcomed the report's conclusions, but whether any action is taken will depend on the politicians. And as the present policies of the three main political parties are not in line with the outcome of the public discussion, it may be a long time before Dutch energy plans for the 1990s are known.

Casper Schuuring

## Polish science

## Academy's position compromised

THE Polish Academy of Sciences has experienced some difficulty in the election of a new president, and many academy members see this as an indication of increased government and party supervision of the academy. Unlike most socialist countries, Poland has no effective analogue of the Soviet State Committee for Science and Technology, so the academy plays a major role not only in basic science but also in the coordination of applied research. The academic secretary of the academy holds ministerial rank, and reports directly to the prime minister. During the liberalization of 1980-81, there was pressure within the academy to make the academic secretary responsible to the academy members.

The promised new legislation on the academy is said still to be in the preparation stage, although it will almost certainly differ considerably from the hopes of the Solidarity period. In the meantime, Dr Aleksander Gieysztor, a historian, who was elected president in the early days of Solidarity, came to the end of his three year appointment, and was due to retire or stand for re-election in December. Party officials responsible for scientific matters thought Dr Gieysztor's reelection would be a hindrance to closer ties between the Polish academy and the academies of other "friendly" (that is socialist) countries, and he was urged not to stand for re-election.

The party's own choice for president was Dr Leonard Sosnowski, a solid state physicist, who is personally popular with many academy members. In the first round of academy elections in December, however, Dr Sosnowski was roundly defeated in the secret ballot. It seems likely that some voted against him on the grounds that they did not wish to be "manipulated" by the party, while others felt that, without casting any aspersions on Dr Sosnowski himself, it was unwise on principle to elect as president a

party member, because this might give rise to a conflict of interests if the academy found itself opposed to party policy.

The second round of voting last week, however, resulted in a clear winner, Dr Jan Karol Kostrzewski, an epidemiologist and a vice president of the academy, of whom little appears to be known — except that he is not a party member.

Vera Rich

## Spare parts wanted



THE California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco is appealing for help in its search for spare parts for the 6.4 inch telescope installed in 1879 at what was then the city's first observatory. Access to a similar telescope would allow the missing parts to be replicated.

The instrument was constructed by the Fauth Company and the mounting may even have been the first of that company's model 72 to have been built. Those who know of the whereabouts of a telescope of this construction are asked please to contact Allan Wilson at the California Academy, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California 94118. Collect calls will be taken. □

## It's an ill wind. . .

THE following exchange took place in the British House of Lords on 23 January. Lords Paget and Cledwyn are members of the Labour Party, Lord Trefgarne is an under secretary of state in the Ministry of Defence.

**Lord Paget of Northampton:** My Lords, does not the noble Lord the Minister feel that all these questions are along the wrong lines? *Homo sapiens* has launched upon a career in which he is numerically doubling himself every 30 or 40 years. He is plainly in need of a massive cull. Nuclear weapons will make possible that massive cull — and, even more, they have the special factor of muddling up the genes so that from the new crop, something rather better than the present lot may emerge. Ought we not look to our good fortune?

**Lord Trefgarne:** My Lords, the originality of the noble Lord's views never ceases to impress me.

**Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos:** My Lords, is the noble Lord the Minister aware that what my noble friend has just said is not Labour Party policy? □