

Summit times were here again

Last week's gathering of the seven major industrial nations of the world in Paris has produced a well-sounding communique, but no sense that the problems it describes will be quickly resolved.

THE conjunction last weekend of the summit meeting of the chief executives of the seven richest countries and the 201st anniversary of Bastille Day (cardinal and ordinal numbers are not always the same) has mercifully passed with no incident more significant (but predictable) than Mrs Margaret Thatcher's rudeness towards the French. Not a single participant should be berated for not having read the whole of the 22-page communique he or she signed, but the document is nevertheless important: the heads of the seven richest governments sound more tentative than is their custom. That may be progress.

The economic issues, customarily dominant in these annual documents, are this time dealt with in a blend of *fortissimo* and *sotto voce* almost calculated to make cynics of us all. The overall message is that things are going well ("World trade developed rapidly last year", for example), that all kinds of past threats (chiefly to growth) have been avoided by cleverness. But there are also a few problems still to be dealt with — chronic trade imbalances (Japan and West Germany earn too much, the United States and — latterly — Britain too little), chronic budget deficits (the United States and Italy are the culprits), the threat of inflation (exported from the United States) and that of recession (caused by high interest rates) as well as the tendency towards trade protection. There is also the debt of the developing countries to worry about. Everybody agrees that the surpluses, deficits, debts and restraints should be eliminated in the interests of mutual development. Paradoxically, everybody feels free to sign, even though almost everybody is a transgressor in one way or another.

The rest of the Paris communique is more interesting. Unremarked, there are two paragraphs on the plight of Bangladesh and a brief mention of that of Yugoslavia. There are also separate sections on the global environment, drugs and AIDS, in the first two of which is embedded a version of a common paradox: those now most acutely aware of the dangers, mostly those whose representatives went to Paris at the weekend, are those who have done most to create the dangers. Western Europe and North America between them are thought to produce more than 40 per cent of 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year; if Mr Mikhail Gorbachev's appeal at the weekend to join the club had not been as quickly rebuffed, the summit-goers might have boasted of more than 75 per cent. And the drugs trade would not flourish

were it not for the economic disparities that make it profitable for poor people to grow otherwise useless crops in the knowledge that people in rich countries will pay through the nose for what can be extracted from them.

Even those not invited to the Paris gathering (though some turned up for other purposes) will acknowledge that problems such as these cannot be made to go away by wish-fulfillment. It is also plain that, within the familiar framework, the only viable schemes for helping the poor countries of the world make progress are plans such as that put forward by the US Secretary of State, Mr James Baker (while still at the US Treasury) for using credit created by the World Bank and the International

Greenpeace — an apology

IN our leading article of 15 June (*Nature* 339, 491; 1989), "A shadow cast on a good cause", we referred to Greenpeace as an organization which harboured "terrorists" and which carried out activities which could fairly be described as terrorist activities. We did not intend so to describe Greenpeace and we accept that there was never any evidence to support such a suggestion.

Greenpeace has pointed out that a commitment to non-violence is one of its founding principles and that, since its inception in 1971, this has never altered. Greenpeace organizations are established in 22 countries throughout the world and nowhere have they advocated, condoned or organized any violent activities. We entirely accept the accuracy of these statements. Further, it is well-known that Greenpeace and its supporters and employees have themselves been the targets of violence, most notoriously the sinking of their ship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, and consequent murder of Fernando Pereira, a Greenpeace employee, by the French state.

We are happy to take this opportunity to apologize to Greenpeace, its officers and staff for the distress and embarrassment that we have caused them. We also today publish a letter (see page 180) from Peter Melchett, executive director of Greenpeace UK. At their request we have made a substantial donation to the trust fund established by Greenpeace to provide for the widow and children of Fernando Pereira. □