

EDITORIAL

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The recent referendum in Austria was aimed at a complete reversal of the country's energy policy, and the abandonment of major power stations in the future. The stimulus was provided by the success in halting the planned Danube hydro-electric dam at Hainburg by an injunction of the High Court. However, this was not due to environmental considerations, but rather on procedural and technical grounds. (A summary of the Court's decision will appear in the next issue). This success led to a misjudging of public opinion and an over-expectation. The organizers were sure they would poll at least 500,000 votes, whereas the final result was 350,000. Why? They had simply demanded too much.

Under Austrian law, the result is similar to a petition; if a minimum of 100,000 votes are polled, parliament must discuss the case. Obviously, such a low poll is, politically speaking, harmful for those working for the environment. This over-stretching of demands has been seen in several instances to be self-defeating in its goals.

The next summit of Western Industrial Nations will take place shortly and one thing of particular interest was the announcement that the conference will consider aspects of the environment. A preparatory meeting took place in London on 19 December last year of environment ministers of summit countries, but at which France did not appear. It is insisting that the summit retain its form and does not like sub- or working groups meeting in advance, as it feels this causes the summit to become too formalized or structured. The London conclusions will be submitted to the May meeting. However, as Mrs. Thatcher has decreed an economy drive in the environment field, it will be interesting to see what actually does emerge from the summit.

In concept, the programme of the World Commission for Environment and Development (see page 4), is an admirable one; but it is an irresistible conclusion that, although the underlying philosophy is to be applauded, the extremely broad remit which the Commission has given itself presents a real danger that its particular strengths may be dissipated and the opportunities presented by this initiative on the international level may not be maximized. The Commission is of particular value because of its wide range and of the tension and respect which the proceedings of a body composed of such distinguished members is said to command. Would, however, these advantages not be better deployed if the Commission were to identify some specific areas and to lend its very considerable authority to the promotion of some genuine progress towards the solution of the problems surrounding those elements? Should it not rather concentrate on fields not covered by other institutions or which can better be handled by other fora?

We also intended to bring an article by Prof. Kiss on a symposium held in January on Antarctica, but, unfortunately, there was not sufficient space this time. But certainly next issue.

22nd March 1985

Wolfgang B. Zemp

Dear Sir,

In a recently issued journal we could find ICEL indexed as being "legal", but under the same grouping — surprise, surprise, we found "The Mothers-In-Law Club International" of Cedarhurst, N.Y., while under the heading "Law-Hydrology" we were impressed to find the International Association of Water Polo Referees!

I know that the ELIS/IUCN system is not such an "automatic" one. Could it be that they in the past had the same experience?

Yours sincerely,

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