

EDITORIAL

Due to our deadline, it has not been possible to cover the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (see last issue at page 51) scheduled to begin on the 16 December in Cairo. It is expected that this will prove to be a very important meeting for the continent and a report is planned for the first issue of next year.

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In closing this volume, no single event stands out as being of world-wide significance for environmental policy — although in regional terms the ASEAN Agreement (see last issue at page 64), could be said to be of such importance. Again, in the regional sphere, last week's European Summit will also set the pattern there for the future.

The enlargement of the European Community, and the accompanying fear that a more diverse Community would become even more ungovernable, was the determining factor for the meeting. The discussions surrounded the amendment of the Rome Treaty and the provision that the Council of Ministers should, in the future, given a qualified majority, be able to increase the pressure on Member States to adopt a Community norm. Up to now, all regulations had to be unanimously accepted by the Council, which, with regard to environmental policy, has had both its positive and negative aspects.

The basic problem is, that as an entity the Community has been progressive in many policy aspects, but when viewed country by country the picture is not so positive. Indeed, if we had not had a consensus system in 1985, the standards set for automobile emissions would be lower — i.e., worse, than they are now. So, in this sense the consensus system has achieved something, since the lead countries were able to block all the "weaker" decisions. There is now a real danger that the forthcoming increase in membership could have a detrimental effect in the environmental field, for the group of countries which find themselves unable to follow the lead countries will become larger and one can foresee a majority vote of these countries against too much progress in this sphere.

The only protection here would be a proper parliamentary control, but in all probability this will not be forthcoming. So, although the Summit achieved a few results — inter alia, the abandonment of one-nation vetoes over most EC decisions, recognition that the European Parliament should be given a greater role and that the Community's competence should be enlarged to include high technology and the environment — these are not sufficient to allay our fears that the power of Parliament will not be adequate.

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We already mentioned in an earlier editorial the impact on UNESCO caused by the USA's withdrawal from that organization, which was one of the first to become involved with environmental questions. This week the UK has followed the US, 10 days before the organization's 40th anniversary. This means that UNESCO has now lost circa 30 per cent of its funding, although officials have stated that it still has sufficient reserves to carry on in the same style. Presumably they mean without reform. However, all those who are politically realistic will have to own that many countries are not convinced by the scope of the promises to re-organize and to increase efficiency, and many have voiced the hope that this latest blow will increase the pressure on the Director General to undertake the necessary steps.

It is our hope that the reduction in funding will not mean a cut-back in the environmental programme or, in this respect, a lower priority rating. □

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