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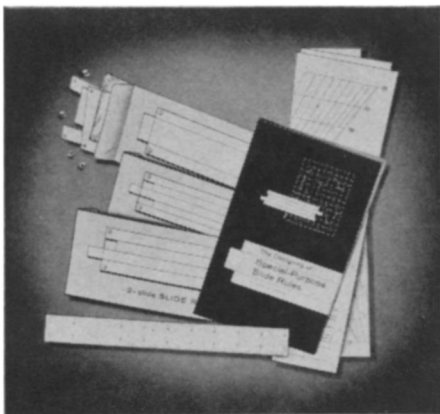
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588/science news/vol. 92/16 december 1967

from abroad

FROM BRUSSELS

The EEC Steps to Close the Gap

After more than a year of rather hollow talk in European countries about the widening technological gap between Western Europe and the United States and the brain drain of trained young Europeans to America, the six countries of the European Community have taken a first timid step toward tackling the problem together.

The Community's Council of Ministers, the body which can take decisions for the whole area and serves as a forum for coordination of policies, held its first meeting ever on this theme in Luxembourg. Present were the ministers of science and technology, operating in the community context for the first time.

The areas chosen for a first attempt at working together are surprising. The committee of national experts whose findings were the starting-point has been told to come back next year with proposals for developing coordinated research in six fields: Data processing, telecommunications, development of new methods of transport (hovercraft, monorails, etc.), oceanography, metallurgy, the fight against air and water pollution, and meteorology.

Observers were quick to notice that key areas like aeronautics and space research were missing. The reason is significant: The proposal on which the ministers worked came from the committee of national experts and the keen young officials of the independent European Commission who provide the secretariat—and the drive for closer cooperation.

They shied away from aeronautics for fear the French should say: "Hands off, this is a field where we work bilaterally with the British;" and from space research for fear the Dutch, now pushing hard for Community membership, should say "nothing doing here unless we work with the British."

This sort of political problem will bedevil all attempts at closer cooperation. Of the plan for a European Scientific Development Fund which could give a federal-type boost to research, there was no mention; any idea of central spending by the Community is out as long as de Gaulle is there to defend the concept of the sovereign national state.

The ministers expressed themselves as hopeful industrialists will work on the preparation of research programs; they aim to strengthen the hopes of scientists in Europe that their research has a chance of getting taken up by the governments.

The meeting brought the usual spate of figures to show how Europe lags behind the United States. French Minister Maurice Schumann reminded the meeting that both the U.S. and the United Kingdom will be running 1,000 megawatt prototype power stations by 1980, and the Soviets a 600 megawatt one by 1972. The French minister has been dropping hints about the need for a second European enrichment plant, to match the British Capelhurst, and this line is expected to be played hard by the French.

Meanwhile the French refused at the same meeting to debate a third five-year research program needed for Jan. 1, 1968 for the European Atomic Energy Community, made up of the same six countries. The first program (1958-63) spent \$215 million and the second (1963-67) \$425 million, mainly on fast reactor research and development. Instead Euratom may get a provisional one year budget while future plans are fought over. Euratom's fate may well decide progress in the six fields chosen in Luxembourg.

J. R. Lambert

FROM AUSTRALIA

Anti-Flea Injections for Dogs, Cats

Veterinarians at Sydney University have developed a flea antigen to desensitize the skins of dogs and cats. Many dogs' skins are so sensitive to flea bites that the severe irritation and constant scratching sets up dermatitis. A spokesman for the Australian Veterinary Association said fleas are more prevalent now that it is summer.

"Dog and cat owners who care about their pets' comfort should have them injected with the flea antigen," he said. "All veterinary surgeons have the substance and a course of three injections costs about \$9. The inoculations last between six and eight months."

But he warned pet owners it was still necessary to bathe their dogs with a mild oily soap every two to three weeks.

The basic ingredient of the vaccine is flea saliva. More than 150 dogs have been treated at the university.

The new vaccine, injected between the layers of the dog's skin, builds up a barrier that resists reaction to bites.

W. A. Scholes