

of 3.0 milligrams per cubic meter of air within six months after enactment, and an enforced reduction to 2.0 milligrams in three years. An escape clause allows operation of a mine at levels of 4.5 milligrams, if a Federal panel allowed it, after which it must be reduced to 3.0 milligrams over three years.

The bill also tightens controls on safety standards for preventing mine explosions—like the Farmington, W. Va. blast (SN: 3/22, p. 278) that sparked the present action.

The bill requires that all mines, including those now classified as non-gassy, install antispark mining equipment to guard against gas explosions caused by the combination of coal dust and methane when ignited.

Although the bill was tied up in a House-Senate conference for a month, the House showed it could probably override a veto by passing the bill 333 to 12. The Senate gave the measure voice-vote approval. □

CERN'S ACCELERATOR

Delay and growing despair

It is rapidly reaching the point where the biggest danger to the giant proton accelerator planned by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) is the delay in getting it started.

The latest blow, ironically struck at a meeting last week that might have produced a major speed-up by picking a construction site for the project, is West Germany's announcement that it will not pay its share of the cost unless a site is selected within its boundaries.

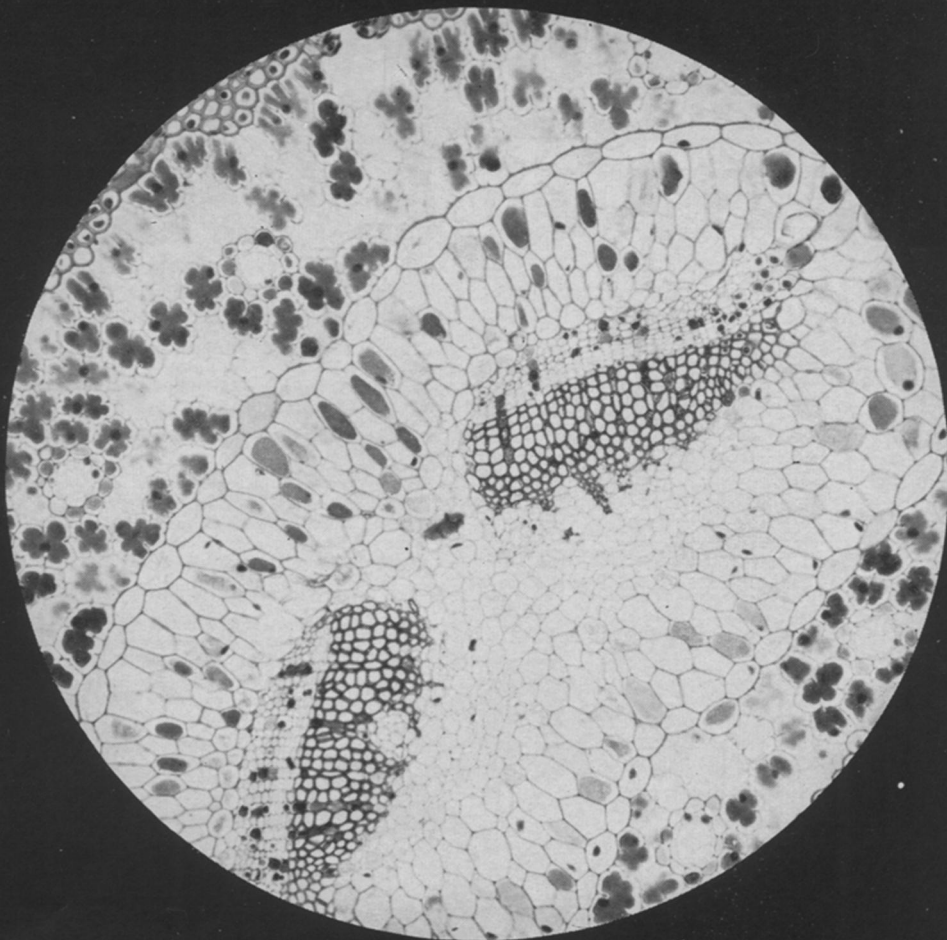
The problem concerning the CERN member nations is that to make the \$334-million investment pay, the project must be started in time to keep the United States' 200-400 billion-electron-volt National Accelerator Laboratory from getting too big a technical lead.

"The time scale for the development of radically new techniques," says a commentary in a recent issue of the CERN COURIER, the group's house organ, "added to the time scale for political approval, added to the time scale for construction of a large, new laboratory could then mean as long as 15 years before Europe is ready with its next generation accelerator."

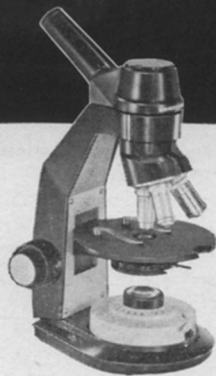
The accelerator survived a major setback 18 months ago when Britain decided to pull out of the project (SN: 7/13/68, p. 30), leaving the other members to make up its share of more than \$19 million. The competition for the site has been severe, but France seemed to have lightened the load in November 1969 when she announced that she would contribute

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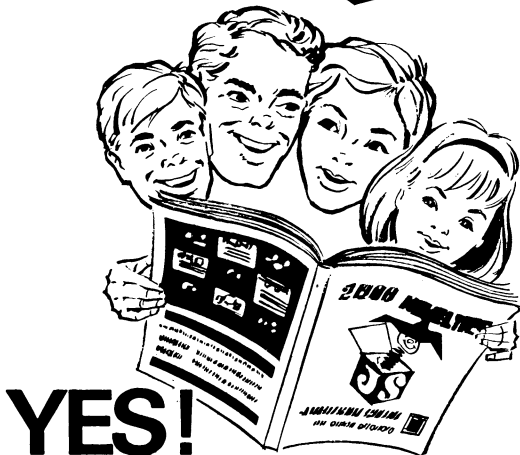
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her share regardless of the site selected (SN: 11/22, p. 486). At that time it seemed that France would win the site derby.

The recalcitrance of West Germany, however, is potentially far more serious than Britain's withdrawal; Britain's action came with time remaining in which to reappraise, reapportion and cut costs. Now, with time a key factor, Germany's share of as much as \$120 million—almost 36 percent of the total cost—probably represents a life-or-death difference for the project.

There have been hopes that Britain would return to help shoulder the financial load, but any prospects for that are not in the immediate future. Unless a German site proves acceptable—France, Austria, Belgium and Italy are also in the running—the accelerator's chances depend on CERN's getting Germany to change its stand.

As the negotiations continue, the prospects of a 15-year delay loom bleakly on the horizon. "It would take a confident man," says the COURIER, "to assert that particle physics in Europe could retain its present strength with existing facilities over this length of time." □

NEWS BRIEFS

Visible comet; Flu in Europe

Comets continually wander in toward the sun from the far reaches of the solar system; most years astronomers see several. But comets visible to the naked eye are comparatively rare. For the first time in more than two years a visible one is approaching the sun and should be above the horizon throughout the United States by mid-January.

Called Tago-Sato-Kosaka after its Japanese discoverers, the comet will be just south of the constellation Sagittarius by January first and visible in the southern United States. □

Asian flu is sweeping through Europe in epidemic proportions, but no major outbreaks are anticipated in the United States this winter. According to scientists at the National Communicable Diseases Center in Atlanta, the Hong Kong epidemic that hit the country last year has probably left most persons immune. The A-2 strain virus infecting European populations is almost identical to the Hong Kong strain.

Public Health Service officials speculate that because travel between the United States and Asia is greater than that between Europe and Asia, Americans returning from Asian visits imported the Hong Kong strain last year. It is just now reaching Europe. □