Communities' budget (Britain and West Germany are the only two) and the rest, seem never to have sought agreement on whether farm support in some form should continue.

The governments must now also pay attention to the reasons why the European Common Market has so far failed to yield the prosperity expected 30 years ago. Quite simply, the internal customs tariffs have been abolished but have been replaced by a host of other restraints on trade. (The first consignment of mainland milk imported into Britain after the British Parliament's reluctant acquiescence that imports could not legally be prevented has been held up for the past two weeks at the port of Newhaven because British government inspectors allege that it had been diluted with water.) For months now, some European governments (including the British, to its credit) have been saying that the time has come to make the Common Market work. Only some of them seem fully to understand that success in that direction would help to solve the agricultural question; a true common market in Europe would increase overall prosperity and, if coupled with an effective industrial adjustment programme, would give all ten members a sense of benefit.

The immediate danger is that the Communities will run out of time. There are only six months until the next summit meeting, in France, but the European Parliament may throw a spanner in the works before that by refusing to agree that the Commission should pay the British Government an agreed rebate on its contribution. That would be financially prudent — there is no money — but politically foolish, likely to incite the British Government to an illegal response, withholding part of the monthly payments required of it, for example. The best course, for all who wish to keep the European Communities alive, is to spend the next six months hammering out plans for making Europe more of a reality.

This is the sense in which the Athens meeting was especially calamitous. There has hardly been a time in the past 30 years when so many European governments have had such a direct interest in making Europe work effectively. Belatedly, most governments seem to recognize that they have a great deal to gain from an effective common market. Many of them have been edged in this direction by transatlantic disappointments in the past few months — the persistence of high interest rates in the United States, the failure of the negotiations at Geneva on intermediate-range missiles and the general uneasiness in Europe that its relations with the outside world may be too exclusively determined by what the Soviet Union and the United States are saying (or not saying) to each other. Only last week, the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization appeared to have regained some of the initiative for East–West relations, and most of them seem to be planning to use next month's meeting on European security at Stockholm as a chance to make something of the opportunity. If the Community is not entirely snagged by its money problems, there is a better chance now than for 30 years that the hopes of its founding fathers may be realized.

But what is the chance that in the weeks ahead the whole system will collapse? Many of those who have always doubted the value of the European experiment are still hoping that events will justify their scepticism. They are destined to be proved wrong. For while the members of the Community would no doubt be able even at this late stage to recruit the army of lawyers needed to unravel legal interdependence, events have already taken charge. In spite of the non-tariff restraints too many members of the Community have thrown up, enough commercial partners in different places have been so well cemented together by the trading relationships that have been formed that there would be an enormous outcry if the process were now reversed. Similarly, there are enough long-distance commuters on Europe's railways and airlines to cause a revolution if ever it were seriously suggested that the mobility of labour offered by the Treaty of Rome should be restrained. And what then would happen to joint research projects, too few it is true, that have begun in the past few years? The way things have turned out, the member governments have no choice but to soldier on. They will cause themselves the least trouble if they do so with a good grace. □

Nuclear susceptibilities

The new Labor Government is agonizing needlessly over its policy on uranium.

THE still-new Labor Government in Australia is following a familiar course in trying to evolve a policy on uranium mining: it has sought independent advice from its advisory council, and will thus not have to make up its own mind until next summer. Meanwhile (see page 629), new projects for extracting uranium from the ground will mostly be kept on ice. The chance is only small that the government will be given opinions different from what its predecessors have been told, by Mr Justice Fox's inquiry in the 1960s for example. Australia, by geological accident rich in uranium, has to strike a balance between the commercial exploitation of a valuable asset and its international responsibility to arrange that Australian uranium is not used for making nuclear weapons illicitly. The new government's dilemma is sharper than that afflicting most of its predecessors because of the Labor Party's tendency to talk as if its endowment of uranium were a thorough nuisance — until, that is, it became the government. Now it has a vested interest in a healthy export trade as well.

The choices ahead are simple, and hardly need rediscovery. It is proper that Australia should seek to ensure that its uranium is not used for making weapons illicitly, for which reason it makes sense that uranium should not be sold on the open market as freely as if it were gold or copper. But equally, there is no reason why the government should not allow uranium contracts to be signed at least with the non-nuclear states belonging to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). For there is now every reason to be confident that the international safeguards system is working well, but it would be counterproductive to follow the Carter Administration's ploy that required buyers of US uranium not to put spent nuclear fuel through a reprocessing plant. The chief difficulty for the Australian Labor Government will arise in its dealings with Britain (which belongs to the NPT but which makes bombs) and France (with China, the only bomb-maker outside the treaty as things are). If the Australian mood is accurately represented by the decision last week not to let a British warship into a dry dock in Sydney Harbour on the suspicion that it was carrying nuclear weapons (depth charges), striking Britain and France off the list of potential purchasers of Australian uranium is probable — but likely to be only a formality, at least while other people's uranium is chasing customers.

The more practical question for the Australian Government is commercial. Although Australia has for more than thirty years supported a programme of research in nuclear energy through its Atomic Energy Commission, and has from time to time flirted with the idea of building a power reactor somewhere, it has won no other direct benefits from this investment. Plainly it is hoping to win some reward from the development of the Synroc process advocated by Professor A.E. Ringwood as the best way of immobilizing fission products in a solid (but it will deserve a hostile response if it tries to make the sale of uranium conditional on the use of that still untested process). What, in its own interest, Australia should be doing is to add extra value to its uranium by building an enrichment plant of some kind, essentially a way of putting onto the world market some of the low-cost electricity still to be had in Australia.

As things are, it is hard to tell whether the Labor Party's squeamishness about uranium will allow the Government of Australia to follow such a sensible course. Unfortunately, the party seems to have fallen into the commonplace trap of confusing the military and civil uses of nuclear fission. Part of the trouble seems to be that Australians' only close experience of nuclear energy has been military — the testing of British nuclear weapons in their own western desert and, more recently, the testing of larger weapons by Britain, France and the United States in the south-west Pacific. The way things have turned out, the Government of Australia could do worse than build a single nuclear power station so as to demonstrate to itself and to its voters that making electricity does not mean making bombs. □

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