

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

EC SCIENCE Successor Not Before 1992

Postponement of a 24 June meeting of the European Community's Research Ministers until September means that the EC Commission's amended proposal for the EC's third Framework Programme human resources and mobility allocation (the 518 MECU "line" 15 of the 15 line Framework 1990-94) will not now be implemented until next year at the earliest. The Council of Ministers was due to vote on the CEC's proposal which had been amended in the light of reports by the European Parliament and by CREST, the EC's consultative committee for science and technology composed of national science administrators.

In emphasizing mobility and the internationalization of advanced training, the amended proposal for line 15, that groups and follows on from previous EC initiatives in science such as SCIENCE Plan and Large-Scale Installations, assigns 2% for conferences, 10% for access to large installations, 30% for networking and teams, and

58% for training. It incorporates Parliament's official view that Large Installations should not cover funding of durable equipment and infrastructure, that 20% of networking funds be set aside to boost so-called new teams based in peripheral European countries, and that training include not only the usual student grants and bursaries but also funds for senior scientists to carry out (and not simply attend) courses. In line with recommendations of the panel which evaluated SCIENCE Plan (see *Europhysics News* 21 (1990) 152), mobility grants will be distributed largely on a collective basis whereby responses to calls for proposals are sent directly to institutes.

The Council of Ministers has not yet pronounced on the Commission's line 15 proposals so it is difficult to know if there will be further unscheduled delays after the September meeting. Under Council rules, passing the proposal unchanged requires a majority decision, modification unanimity,

a time when basic needs such as food, housing, medical resources, and the environment demand urgent attention. Having spent 35 MECU on technical assistance, PHARE thinks this aspect of its mission is fulfilled.

So the Let's Go East programme which aroused so much interest from the scientific community will not be funded and there will be no calls for proposals. There remains a slim chance for a scaled-down initiative using EC funds slated for international collaboration. Meanwhile, it is likely that the 100 or so requests for support sent in from central Europe and classified by DG-12 and DG-13 will be put forward to the national authorities coordinating PHARE activities in each central European country. Science affairs in the PHARE Units in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland are handled by the Deputy Minister of Economy, the Vice Minister responsible for the Committee of Technical and Development Affairs, and a subordinate of the Minister of Economy, respectively.

Materials Calls

Calls for proposals with deadlines in October/November have been announced for five of the 15 lines of Framework 1990-94, namely information, communications, marine sciences, environment and life sciences. Of interest to some physicists will be a preliminary announcement of a call for proposals from September for industrial materials research (line 4 of Framework 1990-94; 748 MECU; deadline: mid-February, 1992). The call is being accelerated to maintain the momentum of existing materials programmes.

No "Let's Go East"

There were 600 requests for further information following comments by European Community parliamentarians at a forum in Strasbourg last January indicating that the EC would consider launching a programme aimed at promoting scientific and technical cooperation with central European countries. Out of this emerged draft proposals for a 30 MECU programme, tentatively called Let's Go East, which would be funded by the PHARE Programme (800 MECU for

1990/91), the EC's main initiative for promoting economic restructuring in the region (see *Europhysics News* 22 (1991) 90). Split 25/75 between EC Directorates for science (DG-12) and telecommunications (DG-13), the aim was to fund the transfer of scientists, meetings, joint research projects, and equipment items.

However, PHARE officials has always argued against *ad hoc* programmes in favour of structured reform managed through national authorities based on indicative plans. It has also had to set priorities at

Letter to the Editor

Arrogance of Certainty

The following is taken from a short article published in *The Times* of London summarizing part of a discussion of Professor Nevill Mott's book "*Can Scientists Believe*" (see *Europhysics News* 22 (1991) 100) at a meeting of the Society for Process Thought.

I am a non-believer in any revealed religion and a scientist. However, in my acquaintance with scientists I find both belief and non-belief, just as in the general population.

Struck with awe and wonder on contemplating the complexity of our universe, we scientists have somewhat enlarged our modest island of understanding. Some feel there must be an intelligence, an architect of all this grandeur, a God, but without ascribing to this unknown entity any interest in our human affairs or in our prayers.

There are also people who believe, as a generalized feeling, that this entity, this God, in some undefined way responds to their trouble and prayers without claiming any describable knowledge of this their God. For revealed religion, God in some way, different for different religions, revealed himself in some precise communicable manner conveying some absolute truth.

I have no quarrel with these three views, but I regard the widespread human tendency to have firm faith in a revealed religion as one of our most negative traits. Indeed, I do not call myself an atheist, but an anti-revelationist. The former would mean denying an entity so differently defined by different people that the denial is meaningless. It is the certainty involved in revelation which horrifies me, and the historical record of the deeds done in the name of such revelations bears me out.

If one looks at religiosity, the immediate staggering fact is that different people fervently believe in different and, in many respects, contradictory religions. How anyone can have the arrogance to think that their own belief is right and anybody who thinks differently is wrong passes my comprehension. Surely the overwhelming evidence is that the human mind tends to believe firmly but incorrectly, since at most one of the many revealed religions can be right.

Nor am I much impressed by what some regard as threads common to different major religions as regards their theory. What has a non-theistic faith like Buddhism in common with a theistic one like Islam?

There is indeed a common morality among all of us humans, enshrined in the golden rule that one should do to others

only as one would have done to oneself. I see it founded in our common humanity, which is why I call myself a Humanist, sometimes supported by religion, sometimes perverted by it. Above all we need to strengthen all that unites us with other humans, whereas religion so readily divides us. This division by faiths we should strive to heal, by relegating religion from the public domain to that of individual belief or non-belief.

What I abhor about revealed religion is its supposed absolute certainty. Here is the real conflict between science and religion. In science we know that our understanding, our theories are only provisional and liable to be upset by observation. On this basis, science indeed has acquired universality, with people of different cultures, ideologies, races, etc. able to cooperate. Science is so successful because it is attuned to the basic human characteristic of fallibility.

Of course we must recognize the substantial role religion has played in history but need not support it. Being an anti-revelationist is in no way arid. It allows one to enjoy freely all that human genius has produced; it allows one to engage untrammelled in the search that is the real joy of living.

H. Bondi, Cambridge