

EDITORIAL

"If governments wait for scientific near-certainty it will often be too late for them to act at all". With this warning reference to the rate and impact of rising levels of carbon dioxide on the world's climate, Emile van Lennep, OECD's Secretary-General, opened recently a session of its Environment Committee.

We have often said that such delay on the part of governments is the reason for many of the difficulties that we have today. They are loathe to take action until a negative effect has been proved, by which time it is often too late.

In his address to the Committee, Saburo Okita (Japan), stressed the responsibility of industrialized countries both for the problems and for action on the problems, taking the view that "an action that may be reasonable for protecting one country's environment may not be for protection on a global scale", an argument also constantly supported by us. He argued, therefore, for an extension of the "originator pays principle" to activities having an international impact. "For any country to discharge pollutants into the environment is to create an extra-national diseconomy", as this is an externalization of the resulting costs.

In view of the increasing importance of this sphere, we decided to devote a large part of this issue to the problems of long-range transboundary air pollution (see pp. 155 and 161), a subject also included in the list of topics drawn up by the ad hoc Meeting of Senior Government Officials Expert in Environmental Law, as suitable for increased global and regional coordination (see p. 150 and Environmental Policy and Law, 8 (1) (1982)).

Discussing the interdependence and vulnerability of the world economy, Jacques Lesourne, previously director of OECD's Interfutures Project, said that relations between the developed and Third World countries were a critical element in resolving global issues, and that the former as a whole, despite differences, must devise a strategy towards an increasingly differentiated Third World. He said that the strategy must take account of the problems of the poor countries where environmental issues are crucial. Citing the Club du Sahel and the Mediterranean Blue Plan as examples, he urged innovative links between

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groups of North and South countries seeking to resolve common problems.

Climatic change, hazardous wastes, destruction of tropical forests and the loss of economically important genetic materials were among the issues raised in the debate as examples for collective action. Not by coincidence, these were also the topics included either in those drawn up by the Senior Level Meeting (see above) or in the resolutions of IUCN (see p. 163 and Environmental Policy and Law, 8 (1) (1982)).

This was the last in a series of important international gatherings to find a way to bridge the growing gap between North and South in the field of development. Cancun's main achievement is that a dialogue was started — although in the light of recent statements, the delegates seem to have been talking at cross purposes.

The Reagan administration in the US has decided to rely on "the magic of the market-place" and plans to bring the private sector more fully into the development and foreign assistance process. This is already taking shape in the US Agency for International Development (AID). A completely new "bureau for private enterprise", is being set up in the agency as an example of the commitment the administration is making in this area. The goal of the programme is to establish a relationship between the US private sector and private sectors in the developing countries, as being the best approach for technology transfer, employment generation and the generation of resources.

Discussing the situation both internationally and nationally (see also p. 174), Harlan Cleveland, adviser on the Global 2000 Report, said that "the policy question is whether things will get worse before they get even worse, or worse before they get better. The statistical probability of a nuclear war is less than most of the environmental risks, even some of the rather longer range risks". He argued that national security should no longer be only understood in terms of purely military strategy. This could cloud the issue. "The security of every nation depends on widening the very definition of national security to include global environmental risks". □