

**RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT**

the technically oriented Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The result: Foes of nuclear power, finding Capitol Hill unresponsive to their concerns, now take their cause to N.R.C. licensing hearings and to the federal courts. They frequently thwart or delay construction by showering the N.R.C. with objections to design details, or to a utility's environmental impact estimates—and then persuading judges that the commission gave them short shrift. Between 1966 and 1970, the typical reactor-construction schedule increased in the United States from just under five years to just over seven years.

By contrast, the political parties of France, West Germany, Sweden, and Britain stake out firm positions on atomic issues. Once in power, they claim a popular mandate on nuclear policy. Feeling no qualms about setting standards, they close most licensing hearings to the public, which permits regulators and utility representatives to focus on what they are best qualified for—technical design. In France, for example, where President Giscard d'Estaing's government strongly backs nuclear power, reports on nuclear safety systems and the names of licensing officials are not available to the public. In Britain, licensing negotiations between utilities and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate are shielded by the Official Secrets Act. Throughout Western Europe, nuclear opponents' chief recourse is voting a party out of power—which happened in Sweden in 1976.

According to Golley, the absence of pressure groups at European hearings produces a regulatory climate of "cooperation, trust, and reasonable compromise" between government and nuclear industry technicians. If the United States wants nuclear investment to continue, he argues, Congress must define acceptable levels of nuclear pollution, and then permit N.R.C. and industry officials to work out the technical details without political interference.

### *Reviving a Rubber Source*

"Guayule—Rubber Crop of the Future?"  
by Edward W. Lawless and Ralph R. Wilkinson, in *MRI Quarterly* (Spring 1980),  
Midwest Research Institute, 425 Volker  
Blvd., Kansas City, Mo. 64110.

A two-foot-high desert shrub native to the American Southwest could cushion the impact in the United States of a widely predicted world rubber shortage, according to Lawless and Wilkinson, scientists at the Midwest Research Institute.

Demand for natural rubber [current world production: 9 million tons] is rapidly outstripping supply. And future manufacture of synthetic rubber [current world production: 3.8 million tons] will be crimped by the steadily rising price of petroleum-based ingredients, say the authors. Aside from the hevea tree, which now produces most of the world's natural rubber on plantations in Southeast Asia, North American guayule is the only plant that has ever been grown commercially for rubber.

In 1910, guayule from Mexico and northern California provided 10

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percent of the world's then tiny rubber output. During World War II, when Japanese forces cut off the West from Southeast Asian rubber, U.S. scientists planted 32,000 acres of the shrub in Texas, Arizona, and California. By 1945, 15 tons of guayule rubber could be processed daily. But after the war, breakthroughs in synthetic rubber production ended the need. The plants were burned off to make way for orange groves.

Guayule latex comes from the shrub's branches and roots. The plants contain up to 20 percent rubber. Guayule needs no irrigation or pesticides. Unlike hevea, the shrub can be mechanically cultivated and harvested.

The National Science Foundation and the U.S. Agriculture and Commerce Departments have launched modest efforts to promote guayule — chiefly by funding both seed collections and breeding research at the University of Arizona and the Los Angeles County Arboretum. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs is pushing it as a cash crop for American Indians. So far, the main problem seems to be yield. Though some guayule fields produced 1,400 pounds of rubber per acre per growth cycle (3–5 years) during World War II, hevea consistently yields more than 2,000 pounds per acre annually.

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**ARTS & LETTERS**


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*The Trial*  
*Behind 'The Trial'*

"Kafka and the Beiliss Affair" by Arnold J. Band, in *Comparative Literature* (Spring 1980), 223 Friendly Hall, University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore. 97403.

A court inquest in Prague was probably the inspiration for Franz Kafka's classic novel *The Trial* (written in 1914), suggests Band, a professor of comparative literature at UCLA.

The year 1912 marked a turning point for Kafka (1883–1924), then working as a young clerk in a Prague insurance company. In the fall, he wrote the short stories "The Judgement" and "Metamorphosis" and the first chapters of the novel *Amerika*. [Kafka refused to publish his writings during his lifetime.] Moreover, during that year, the attention of Kafka's fellow Eastern European Jews was riveted on the trial of Mendel Beiliss, an obscure Kiev Jew accused of killing a Christian child before Passover and of saving his blood to prepare unleavened bread. Such accusations—and they were not uncommon—led to recurrent anti-Semitic rioting throughout Eastern Europe. Tsar Nicholas II used the Beiliss affair to whip up anti-Jewish feeling in Russia and shore up his regime.

Kafka never mentioned the Beiliss episode in his known literary works or in his diaries. But Max Brod, a friend and biographer who