C. Policy Issues

The lead group in a synthetic fuels development program would have to address the difficult problem of determining ground rules for project funding which assures equitable government and industry cost sharing. One favored technique was bidding by industry for the interest rate on a government loan or the subsidy on a synthetic fuel product. Clauses for renegotiation might have to be included if the future energy situation continues to be volatile. It was felt that bidding was the best way of determining which projects and processes were really nearest connectial viability. Another incentive mentioned was a guaranteed market such as fuel for DOD vehicles, ships or planes.

A major concern of industry was insurance against massive losses caused by precipitous scaling up of inadequately tested technology. The government "insurance" would have to be based on some mutually agreed upon norm for losses due to construction, startup and operation delays.

Although industry would be held responsible for errors in technical judgment, it would probably have to be protected against non-technical pressures such as competition from low priced foreign cil. On the other hand, the government should avoid subsidizing projects that private industry was prepared to carry out without government support.

Industrial contacts were generally of the opinion that government involvement in commercial—scale plants should not be permanent. Protection against catastrophic loss during early operation of a plant was necessary, but after several years government guarantees should be gradually withdrawn.

After the first generation of synthetic fuel plants was operating independent of direct subsidy, a number of policy questions remain: Should the government encourage operation and expansion of a coal gesification and liquefaction industry by structuring the bread fuel vaculations so as (1) to increase subsidies to coal or (2) to reduce subsidies to petroleum production? Another thorny problem could be the degree to which energy prices for domestic production should be government subsidized, if necessary, to produce parity with international oil prices. Subsidies might be needed because energy intensive industries in the U.S. would operate at a disadvantage in international trade if domestic fuel prices were exorbitant.

Finally, one of the most emphatically stated industrial opinions was that government involvement should be temporary. When the large scale technical base had been established, government support should be terminated. The emergent synthetic fuels industry should be left to compete on a free market without "artificial" price adjustments relative to other domestic fuels.

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