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Gas Crisis a Year Too Late for FEA

The natural gas crisis struck America a winter too late to suit the Federal Energy Administration.

Its experts had gravely predicted a severe natural gas shortage for the winter of 1975-76. They spent over \$100,000 for pamphlets, radio messages and TV spots to instruct the nation how to survive the hard winter.

FEA officials hung their heads in embarrassment when their dire prediction failed to materialize. The wrath of Congress also fell upon the agency because of the false foreboding.

But all those expensive pamphlets and media messages are still gathering dust as the natural gas supplies dwindle dangerously. For one thing, the unused messages call upon Americans to lower their thermostats to 68 degrees. President Carter wants the temperature to be held down to 65 degrees. "We can't contradict the President," said a spokesman, with some logic.

But the main reason the massive media blitz was abandoned, according to insiders, was that it offended some powerful members of Congress. An urgent, angry complaint was registered with the FEA on Nov. 19, 1975, by Reps. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), John E. Moss (D-Calif.) and the late Torbert H. MacDonald (D-Mass.).

They protested that the proposed advertising campaign was unfair, unfounded and offensive to Congress. One commercial, which the FEA planned to distribute to thousands of radio-TV stations, was titled "Pack of Lies." In sarcastic language, it alleged that the claims about no gas shortage were a "pack of lies."

The irate congressmen contended it was the FEA commercial that was

packed with lies. They cited findings which disputed the gas industry's cries of shortage. "The gas curtailment figures disseminated by the Federal Power Commission and the Federal Energy Administration are misleading and overstated," charged the congressmen.

Therefore, they suggested sharply: "The FEA's proposed advertising campaign appears to be a lobbying campaign with the use of appropriated funds to induce Congress to change the law."

As it turned out, the shortage never occurred in the winter of '76, the media campaign was quietly shelved and the responsible FEA officials were in disgrace. Some were replaced.

The chagrined FEA officials have been feeling a bit better since the belated gas shortage seized the nation this winter. But they still don't intend to dig all those old warnings out of the storage rooms. The year-old ads, confessed one official, "were poorly done."

In From The Cold—Lucien Conein is an unreconstructed spy from the old cloak-and-dagger school. He is given to tough talking and hard drinking. And, as he has boasted to interviewers, his ambition is to go to bed with 4,000 more different women before he dies.

This crack almost got Conein fired from the Drug Enforcement Administration, where he is engaged in the comparatively peaceful pursuit of drug smugglers.

In bygone days, he was a crack CIA agent. He belonged to the breed of swashbuckling spies who specialized in torrid boudoir romance, violent death

on fog-sheathed waterfronts and jungle heroics behind enemy lines.

His retirement from the Central Intelligence Agency and a few quick snorts were enough to loosen his tongue. He told interviewers solemnly that he would never go against the Corsican Mafia because he was one of them. He also volunteered that he had a yen for amatory adventure. And he made other outrageous statements, as they occurred to him.

Whatever his seriousness about the 4,000 women, Conein has no connection with the Corsican brotherhood. But his statements irritated both then-Attorney General Edward H. Levi and Drug Enforcement Administrator Peter Bensinger, who had authority over him.

The two men discussed what to do about Conein's undisciplined tongue. Bensinger was sufficiently stirred to order an investigation. His gumshoes, accordingly, snooped into the life and times of Lucien Conein.

It isn't known whether they counted the women in his life, but the only solid evidence against him was that he had a big mouth. For his intemperate remarks, the DEA charged him with "conduct prejudicial to the government."

There had been talk of firing Conein, but the formal charges specified only a 15-day suspension. Offended at such pettiness, the old jungle fighter hired a lawyer and counterattacked.

Bensinger took a long breath, reviewed the case and wisely decided to drop it. "There was an over-reaction," he acknowledged. Conein, as a result, received only a verbal admonishment to try, please, to be more discreet.