

campaign to convince legislators of the importance of plastics.

A more immediate problem for the industry is the rising cost of its major feedstocks. Because of increased demand for use in unleaded gasoline, prices of aromatics, notably xylenes and toluene, have roughly doubled in the past six months. Other important feedstocks have gone up several cents per pound in recent weeks. Further increases are on the way. Even now, one show visitor was heard to complain, "Plastics isn't the cheapest way to go any more." □



### Achema draws chemical engineers to Frankfurt

Described at the opening ceremonies as "the place where the chemical engineering world meets," West Germany's triennial Achema last week indeed exerted its usual magnetism. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Chemisches Apparateswesen (Dechema), sponsor of the chemical engineering congress and exhibition, expected that by the end of the week more than 150,000 visitors would pass through the turnstiles at Frankfurt am Main's sprawling fairgrounds. There, among the lectures and exhibits that mirror the world of chemical technology, they found concern expressed about plant safety and future energy supplies, continuing efforts directed toward pollution control, and a heightened interest in biochemical technology.

## Supreme Court upholds ban on Laetrile use

The Supreme Court unanimously has upheld the federal government's authority to outlaw the sale of drugs not proved to be safe and effective. The ruling came in a case involving Laetrile, the alleged, though illegal, cancer treatment.

The high court decision reversed a ruling by the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals that terminally ill cancer patients should be allowed to take any treatment they choose since they would probably die in any event.

The case originated with Glen L. Rutherford of Conway Springs, Kan., who claimed that he was cured of cancer in 1971 by Laetrile that he obtained legally in Mexico. Rutherford's lawyers asserted that the purported drug, which is derived from apricot pits, should be "grandfathered" or exempted from the efficacy requirements imposed by the 1962 amendments to the Food, Drug & Cosmetic Act.

Not so, says the high court. Laetrile meets the current definition of a "new drug" and thus must be proved safe and effective under terms of the law. Moreover, writes Justice Thurgood Marshall for the court, the original 1938 federal drug law was never in-

tended to exempt drugs used for treatment of the terminally ill. "To the contrary," Marshall declares, "in deliberations preceding the 1938 act, Congress expressed concern that individuals with fatal illnesses such as cancer should be shielded from fraudulent cures."

The government had a heavy stake in the Laetrile case. If the high court had ruled otherwise, the Food & Drug Administration's powers to regulate drugs would have been severely undercut. But despite the court ruling, use of Laetrile will continue apace in the U.S. For one thing, nearly 20 states have legalized intrastate sale of Laetrile and illegal importation of the substance likely will continue. The Supreme Court decision probably will not deter Laetrile's enthusiastic supporters very much.

FDA has maintained all along, though, that the substance is ineffective and therefore its availability could deter cancer patients from seeking medically proved cancer treatments. At the same time, contrary to arguments by its supporters, there is evidence that Laetrile can produce toxic reactions in those who take the drug in modest doses. □

## Confidence in chemical industry outlook sags

The more successful their operations, the more caution they project. Either it's just healthy skepticism, or chemical companies' chief executives have detected coming weaknesses in the industry.

Chemical executives' confidence in the six-month outlook for their industry has fallen to the lowest point in the current business expansion, reports the Conference Board, a business research group in New York City, in a quarterly survey. Specifically, the confidence measure for the chemical industry has fallen to 41 in May from 43 in February and 56 in May 1978. The overall scale runs from 100 for substantially better to 0 for substantially worse.

In their latest opinions, chemical executives' confidence in their industry is below the average confidence of executives throughout U.S. manufacturing. The broader group rates the six-month outlook with a 43 in May, down slightly from 46 in February and 60 in May 1978.

The Conference Board's survey implies that, in general, chemical executives do not share the optimism expressed by a few executives lately.

For example, at the Chemical Manufacturers Association's annual meeting in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., earlier this month, officials reported excellent business this spring with few signs of a downturn.

Support for the current stance of the Conference Board's chemical industry survey group comes in confidence measures from executives in some key chemical market areas. Notably, the confidence rating from the textile and apparel sectors fell to 40 and 38, respectively, in May from 43 for both in February. In May 1978, the corresponding figures were 58 and 56. Textile markets tend to be early indicators of new directions in the chemical industry's business cycle.

In another important chemical market area, paper, executives' confidence was even worse in May. The most recent confidence measure from paper executives hit 35, down from 49 in February and 57 in May 1978.

Perhaps most important, the outlook from retailing executives, closest to the ultimate consumer, sank considerably this spring. Their confidence rating fell to 38 in May from 45 in February and 59 in May 1978. These figures are consistent with declining retail sales gains or drops reported by companies and the government in the second quarter. □