

gave the latest figures for the numbers of computers and associated staff in government departments (Table 1). But the sub-committee, and the civil service witnesses who have been appearing before it, are obviously hamstrung by having to wait for Mr John Davies or one of his colleagues to come down from the mountain with the promised ministerial statement on the support for the British computer industry.

The CSD has taken to heart comments made before the Select Committee last year that the government was relying too much on its own internal programming resources in its assessment of government use of software. The witnesses revealed that the volume of business placed with outside software houses will now rise from £570,000 in 1969/70 to more than £1 million in 1970/71 and possibly to more than £1.5 million in 1971/72. But, like the other witnesses who have appeared this year, the CSD thought it would be even harder to distinguish between British and foreign software for the purposes of giving preference than it is to say which computers can be called British. Mr Creamer also said that ICL has less software available than American companies, but what they have is good and fulfils the government's requirements.

Apart from doctrinaire reasons, it looks as if one of the explanations for this significant shift in policy which will delight the software houses is that the government is having difficulties in training and keeping systems and programming staff.

As things stand, however, ICL continues to be the apple of the British government's eye in the hardware field. The CSD witnesses revealed that in the year ending on March 31, they expect 50 per cent of large computers and 86 per cent of small computers for the government to be bought through single tender contracts, and ICL will be the beneficiary with the exception of one or two small orders to Honeywell and IBM. In the same period up to March 31, the government will place £18,189,000 worth of orders for administrative and general purpose computers, of which £16,543,000 worth will be bought from ICL. But it seems that the government has no intention of boosting ICL further by ordering computers in bulk. Last year the managing director of ICL told the Select Committee that his company had never been asked for more than four of a particular type of computer at once, whereas the United States government sometimes purchases computers in large batches to the benefit of American companies. According to the CSD witnesses, however, the British government has not been offered a good enough discount to balance the disadvantages of bulk ordering.

Since last year when the CSD defined itself as the central coordinator which ensures that government policy on the use

of computers within departments is correctly applied, there seems to have been a devolution of responsibility to the departments themselves. Instead of providing detailed support to the departments, CSD staff are being redeployed "to a more active role of planning, proposal of common policies and promotion of technical developments of common interest". This has been made possible by the growing competence of the departments. In cases where departments still need help the practice now will be to call in the computer service industry.

Sakharov's Rights

from our Soviet Correspondent

DR ANDREI SAKHAROV, the Russian physicist and campaigner for human rights, has been told by the Procurator General of the USSR, Roman Rudenko, that he must either disband his unofficial "Committee for Human Rights" or else register it with the state. Dr Sakharov, well known already for his appeals of June 1968 and April 1970 for greater academic and personal freedom, founded his committee last November. The original members were Dr Sakharov himself, Valerii Chalidze and Andrei Tverdokhlebov. From the beginning, the committee stated that it would have nothing to do with any foreign or domestic organizations that were anti-Soviet.

According to Soviet law, any organization, whatever its aims and activities, must be registered. When founding the committee, Dr Sakharov announced his willingness to comply with this regulation. It seems, however, that for three months the official attitude to the committee has been ambivalent—whether to approve it and thus tacitly to admit the need of such an organization, or to ban it and thus give evidence of such a need.

The new move by Procurator-General Rudenko seems designed to bring matters to a head. Official recognition is hardly to be expected, yet it is difficult to imagine Dr Sakharov either abandoning his human rights campaign or discrediting himself by putting himself outside the law. So far, his appeals have always been based on the proposition that greater personal and academic freedom can only be to the benefit of the Soviet Union; his dissent, he maintains, is motivated by loyalty to his country. It would be ironic, indeed, if that very loyalty should now put him outside his country's laws.

Parliament in Britain

NRDC

MR JOHN DAVIES, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, said that a review is being carried out of the arrangements for the exploitation of inventions resulting from public research and the support by the National Research Development Corporation for the development and exploitation of inventions from other sources. This review is being undertaken by Mr Docksey, formerly general manager of the research and technical development department of British Petroleum Ltd, and it should be completed well before the end of this year. (Written answers, February 17.)

Pollution and Sewage Disposal

THE government intends soon to announce its conclusions on the chief recommendations of the Working Party on Sewage Disposal. Announcing this, Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for the Environment, said that the proposal for combining water authorities with sewage authorities has been considered by the Central Advisory Water Committee, and this body has recently completed a report of its findings.

Asked by Mrs Kellett about the progress of his review of the effects of all forms of pollution, Mr Walker said that he is reviewing the whole question of pollution of rivers and seas. (Written answers, February 17.)

Students' Grants

MR WILLIAM VAN STRAUBENZEE, Under Secretary, Department of Education and Science, said in reply to a question from Mr Kenneth Marks that it would cost £35-40 million in the current academic year to abolish the parents' contribution to grants for students in higher education. Mr Marks also asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether she will introduce legislation to extend mandatory grants to students on full-time Higher National Diploma courses, and also whether she will set up a working party to examine the question of parental contribution to student grants. Mrs Margaret Thatcher promised that both these questions will be considered during the current review of grants. (Written answers, February 22.)

CS

MR RICHARD SHARPLES, Under Secretary at the Home Office, said that the committee under the chairmanship of Sir Harold Himsworth which is looking into the effects of the use of CS in Northern Ireland will not now be reporting until about the middle of this year. It was originally hoped that the committee would have reported last autumn, but it is still taking evidence. (Written answers, February 18.)