

## OLD WORLD

# ELDO Ends Europa II Programme

THE European Launcher Development Organization (ELDO) has abandoned its work on the Europa II launcher. The ELDO council was left with no alternative but to terminate the project following an announcement by France and Germany that they would not be able to support it from May 1. As most of the finance comes from these two countries the council directed the Secretary General of the organization to close down the projects and inform those companies which hold contracts from ELDO that the programme has ended.

The decision leaves the 9-year-old organization with no current programme and no immediate prospect of one, although its legal framework still exists.

The closure of the programme follows the cancellation of the Europa III project last year and the failure of F11, the first test firing of Europa II in November 1971. In all, ELDO has launched eleven rockets, only six of which have been completely successful, chiefly in the early stages of the development of Europa I.

Precisely what will happen to the organization is not yet clear. ELDO employs a few more than 300 people in Paris and at Kourou in French Guiana, ELDO's test centre, some of whom are certain to be made redundant. The member countries of ELDO will have to decide what is to happen to the organization, and the likeliest possibility at present is that it will be restructured with the intention of retaining those personnel with expertise in launcher development, and organizing the liquidation of the Europa project. But quite what, if anything, the organization will do between now and January 1, 1974, when it is to be merged with the European Space Research Organization in a European Space Agency is not clear (see *Nature*, 240, 516; 1972).

The decision to end the Europa programme leaves Europe with no plans to develop a launcher other than those of the French to build the L3S rocket. This was proposed as the alternative to Europa III and approved in principle by the European Space Conference last December, although no funds other than from France have yet been put into it. It is possible, if the French can persuade the Germans to participate, that the new agency will develop LS3 as a cooperative venture, using some of the expertise assembled within ELDO.

But there are even doubts about the

continued viability of L3S for, although there is some provision for developing the launcher in the French budget this year, enthusiasm for the project may have waned somewhat now that M. Michel Debré, the launcher's chief protagonist, is no longer Minister of Defence following the French general elections.

The decision to end the Europa project typifies the continuing disagreement within Europe on the subject of launchers. Germany (and Britain) have long advocated buying launchers from the United States as and when they are needed. The French, on the other hand, argue that Europe must maintain an independent capability, and it is this that led to the proposal to develop LS3, a launcher with similar capabilities to Europa III but which, the French claim, could be built at about two-thirds of the cost.

But whether L3S is developed or not, the French, the Germans, and the

European Space Research Organization are all going to have to rely on the United States to launch *Symphonie*, the Franco-German communications satellite, and COS-B, ESRO's next scientific satellite, both of which were due to be launched on Europa II.

## DRUGS

### Safety or Service?

CONCERN over the safety of new drugs must not be allowed to get out of proportion, according to Mr Ivar Boden, retiring president of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. Mr Boden, speaking at the annual dinner of the association recently, said that it is unlikely that entry into the European Economic Community will markedly change the strategy of the chief British drug companies. He hoped that Britain would not be forced to change its already well established system for

## ROYAL INSTITUTION

### Healthier Situation

IN spite of grave predictions made a year ago the Royal Institution showed a slight profit for its operations during 1972. When the 1971 annual report came out showing a deficit of £7,812, the then newly appointed treasurer, Sir Gordon Cox, forecast a deficit of £17,600 in 1972. But economies in nearly all the Royal Institution's operations combined with a few benefactions resulted in a profit of £5,486 last year.

The figures for 1971 and 1972, however, are not directly comparable because a new system of classifying the accounts and a new system of treating the money available for research have been introduced. The net result is that the Royal Institution is more than £16,000 better off this year than last.

The process of selling off books which were not considered essential has now been concluded and £150,000 has been raised which has been invested for the benefit of the library. The interest from this money was £8,575 in 1972 and more will be expected this year from this source.

The membership drive, which was expected to increase the membership by 300 a year, failed to reach this target because 50 members either died or did not renew their subscriptions—the net increase was 250.

One of Sir Gordon's aims is to make the membership activities self sustaining

—last year there was a deficit of £3,268 in this sector. But the trend is most satisfactory and it is hoped that these activities should, at least, break even during 1973.

Apart from economies in most activities, one of the other reasons for the accounts looking much more healthy in 1973 is an anonymous gift of \$188,000 over ten years to be used to provide administrative assistance and services for the director, Sir George Porter. In 1972 this fund added £5,846 to the accounts. Also during 1972, Applied Photophysics Limited contributed £4,027 to the Royal Institution.

But what of the future? During the past ten years the Royal Institution has accumulated a deficit of about £50,000. Sir Gordon Cox said this week that it is his intention to make good that sum in the next ten years. But because of inflation, twice this amount will have to be recouped before the finances are in the same situation as they were in 1963.

As far as 1973 is concerned several effects make predicting the financial position at the end of the year uncertain. First, the effect of corporation tax is unknown, and Value Added Tax will take about £2,000 of the Royal Institution's funds. Because of the changed system of income tax in Britain the institution will probably suffer a decrease in income, estimated to be about £500, from recovered income tax covenants.