

COMECON

● A team from the Warsaw Institute of Plasma Physics and Laser Fusion, headed by Professor Sylwester Kaliski, Poland's Minister for Education and Science, has achieved the generation of neutrons by thermonuclear fusion using a concentric explosion with an exceptionally high degree of symmetry. The result was announced at an international conference in Prague last week and received considerable eye-of-conference publicity on Polish radio and television. According to the broadcast, this is the first published result of neutrons from thermonuclear fusion being obtained by pure explosion. The broadcast spoke optimistically of "extending the process to a commercial scale", but the figures indicate the production of only 3×10^7 neutrons from 10^{-7} g deuterium, and it is estimated that a level of some 10^{17} neutrons would be required for commercially viable thermonuclear power generation.

● It is reported from Poland that, in spite of the amnesty of last July, repressive measures are still being taken against supporters of the Workers' Defence Committee. The WDC was set up a year ago to defend the rights of the Radom and Ursus workers suffering reprisals for their part in protests against soaring food prices. During the next few months, a number of WDC members, including several scientists, were themselves subjected to repression, but support for the WDC grew. At the beginning of June, a group in Wroclaw, mostly from higher academic institutions, sent a letter to the government criticising the press campaign against the WDC and urging that sanctions against WDC members be withdrawn.

A letter to the WDC now claims that shortly afterwards reprisals began against the signatories. Three lecturers, including Dr Eugeniusz Porada, a mathematician, lost their jobs, ostensibly for trivial administrative reasons. The letter was signed by Professor Stanislaw Hartman of the Mathematics Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences; he and Professor A. Duda have been relieved of their posts as consultants to the special mathematics courses for gifted young people, founded in 1973 in several university cities.

● Last month, the supervisors of the Comecon Departments of Inventions met in Ulan-Bator, Mongolia, to discuss the problems of patent protection within the Comecon bloc. Until the late 1950s, the Comecon countries somewhat neglected the protec-

tion of inventions and innovations; since then, the position has changed so much that now even minor factory modifications are granted a patent or its equivalent. However, a survey of Comecon patent law, published in Warsaw in 1970, revealed considerable discrepancies in practice between the various countries. Thus, in the



USSR and Bulgaria, an 'author's certificate' gives unlimited protection; in most Comecon countries, the patent protection is for 15 years, in East Germany 18 years and in Hungary 20 years. The invention must be used within two years of its being reported in Hungary, and within three years of the granting of the protection in Poland; in the USSR there is no obligation to use an economic patent at all. In 1971, the Conference of Supervisors of Departments of Inventions was established to promote cooperation in the field of patents and to eliminate such anomalies.

The twelfth meeting of the conference, which was opened recently by the Mongolian Deputy Premier, S. Luvsangombo, and chaired by the Deputy Chairman of the Mongolian State Committee for Science and Technology, presented a promising picture of work in hand. A progress report was presented on the co-ordination of draft agreements on mutual legal protection of instructions of origin and designation of origins of commodities. A model bilateral agreement on conducting patent investigations was approved. Special attention was paid to problems of "rationalising" the economy, including the work of "rationalisers" within the framework of international economic organisations and a model system for handing over rationalisation proposals as part of scientific and technical cooperation agreements.

● One important element in Comecon integration plans is computerisation of both production and planning. As far as the production of components is concerned, the computerisation plans seem to be going forward well. Bulgaria has recently built up with Soviet aid a flourishing electronics industry, and last year earned more than 480 million foreign-currency leva from exports.

When it comes to the introduction of computers into the Comecon economies, however, the picture is less rosy. In Czechoslovakia, for example, the predominant trend so far has been the construction of data-processing systems for individual factories. These facilities, however, have been grossly under-used, the factory computers often simply recording data which is not applied in subsequent management and planning decisions. Recent figures from the Czechoslovak Federal Statistical Office indicate that on occasion factories have not used as much as two-thirds of the available machine-time, but either sold it to other consumers, or else simply wasted it. Accordingly, greater emphasis is now being placed on the construction of combined data-processing centres.

● Anti-pollution measures have recently been commanding a great deal of attention throughout the Comecon media. Thus Bulgaria, which recently introduced a set of "Basic Guidelines for the Conservation of the Environment", is to spend 78 million leva in Sofia *okrug* (county) alone, mainly on water-treatment plants on the Iskar, Marissa and Topolnitsa rivers, and on equipment to remove toxic gases from the air. This is clearly a matter of some urgency—last year in the Sofia *okrug* 106 industrial, economic and commercial enterprises had to be closed down, 25 of them permanently, for violating public health requirements.

In Hungary, air pollution surrounding the Metallokema works at Nagy-teteny has been causing concern since the middle of April. Complaints from local residents indicate that household pets were dying and fruit, vegetables and window-sills were covered with a greyish dust. In addition, three small children had to be treated in hospital for lead poisoning: an investigation by the local health authorities showed that the lead content of the atmosphere was 30–40 times the permitted level, and on 30 June the factory was ordered to close. The order was ignored.

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