

said Sir Alec. "We will have to balance saying something quickly with saying something reliable." The party hopes to report by the end of the year.

Meanwhile budgets for the research councils and the universities have fallen in real terms since 1978-9. Last week the UGC grant for the academic year 1980-1 was announced at £987 million, which says the Department of Education and Science "taking into account . . . the withdrawal of the subsidy for new overseas students . . . is about 2% lower in real terms than in 1979-80". The ABRC budget was also announced at £383 million for 1980-81 (see *Nature*, 3 April, page 000) with small increases for subsequent years, but these values are lower than those projected by the previous Labour government.

Jobs are also under pressure from these cuts, leading to a rapidly increasing average age for research groups; so it is hoped in some quarters that the terms of reference of the Merrison party will allow it to consider people as well as equipment.

● **EEC students to pay less:** The demand that foreign students must pay full tuition fees at British universities has been relaxed

for members of European Community countries, according to a report in *The Times*. This will increase pressure from Commonwealth countries (which account for half the UK's foreign students) that they also should get special treatment. The government is probably relying on the small number of EEC students in Britain remaining small, but, says *The Times*, it may have neglected the 3,500 Greek students who already outnumber EEC students. From 1981 Greece will be a member of the EEC and there may be an even greater inflow of students from the country.

● **£5 million for overseas student problem:** Mark Carlisle, Secretary of State for Education and Science, announced in the House of Commons last week that £5 million would be available in the academic year 1980-81 "to help ensure that uncertainty about prospective income from overseas students does not adversely affect selected postgraduate work of particular importance to this country". University sources last week had had no official indication of the meaning of this phrase.

Robert Walgate

Soviet Union

Academy stresses applied science

LAST November, Mr Brezhnev, in a major speech, charged the Soviet Academy of Sciences with greater responsibility for applied science and technology. Last month's annual general meeting of the Academy stressed that this new emphasis is well to the fore in its thinking.

How far this reflects a genuine change of direction is, of course, disputable. The Academy has already made it clear that it had been involved in applied research for some time before Brezhnev's speech. Nevertheless, the emphasis in this year's reports on the applied value of the Academy's work may be significant. President of the Academy Anatolii Aleksandrov, in his Presidential address, stressed particularly the work of the Shumyakin Institute of Bio-organic Chemistry, not only on protein structure, but also on genetic engineering, with, he implied, potential economic applications. He likewise commended the Academy's Institute of Microorganisms Biochemistry and Physiology for its work on artificial proteins for animal feed, based on oil products and natural gas, and in particular, the organic chemistry data bank established at Novosibirsk, which, he said, would enable scientists to develop new organic compounds with predetermined properties.

Physics and Geography Department of the Academy, Leonid Brekhovskikh outlined possible uses for the Soviet Union's glaciers and ice cover. His department, he said, had

devoted much time and resources to the study of glaciers as a fresh water source, since they contained "twice as much fresh water" as all the world's rivers and lakes. Ice could also, he said, be used as a building material in northern areas, when constructing port berths and laying roads.

From the newly exploited hinterland of the Baikul-Amur mainline railway, Academician Aleksandr Yanshin reported that after many years of forecasting and prospecting for potassium salts in Siberia, a major deposit, sufficient to ensure the "chemicalisation of agriculture in Siberia" had been located in the north of the Irkutsk *oblast*. While Academician Aleksandr Fokin, Deputy Chief Academic Secretary to the Presidium, in effect summarised the tone of the meeting by stating that great attention was being paid to links between research and production.

To carry out this massive programme, the meeting was told, Soviet funding for science had been raised by 55% during the past seven years (while the number of scientists actively involved in research had grown by 50% to 1,300,000).

In his Presidential address, Aleksandrov also stressed that, to solve such global problems as the search for new energy sources and the exploration of space, international cooperation was essential. He censured the US administration for curtailing Soviet-American scientific ties and exchanges.

Vera Rich

Soviet Union

Media accuses US of war-mongering

US allegations about a bacteriological warfare incident at Sverdlovsk were met by the Soviet Union not merely with protests that the US was attempting to wreck the Geneva review conference on bacteriological warfare, but also by counter-allegations that the US was preparing itself for chemical war. In a major media campaign, the Soviet Union has cited sources ranging from *Newsweek* to "documents of the Church of Scientology" to support claims that the US is amassing "wet-eye" (nerve gas) and "dry eye" (stable toxic agent) bombs, carrying out experiments with toxic chemicals on US citizens, building up twelve arsenals of nerve gas, bacteriological aerosols, narcotics, defoliants and herbicides, while working on a "new generation" of binary gas chemical weapon "causing death in a matter of split seconds".

Much of the radio material, in both Russian and English, was beamed at the Third World. Special emphasis was given to alleged CIA experiments on "coloured people" in order to test the vulnerability of different ethnic groups. And a whooping cough epidemic of the mid-1960s in Florida, which resulted in 12 deaths, was specifically attributed to the CIA.

Nor was Britain exempt from such charges — it was attacked for alleged work on bubonic plague virus (citing the *Daily Telegraph*, training in the use of toxins at the army staff college (a "recent British TV film") and the new firing range near Porton Down (*Now!*), "officially, being used to devise protection against chemical warfare").

A few days after Tass's accusation, in the "Russian for abroad" service of Moscow radio, that the US are working, in "top-secret military laboratories", to "cultivate bacteria which could cause mass epidemics like anthrax, typhoid, plague, smallpox, etc", it had to elaborate on the official explanation of the Sverdlovsk incident. It said it was an outbreak of anthrax, caused by "adverse weather conditions in the autumn-winter of 1978-79" (which made sheep and cattle susceptible to contagious diseases), lack of personal hygiene in tending livestock, and the purchase of unbranded meat, wool and hides from unauthorized individuals. In spite of the struggle against the disease, it was explained, anthrax has never been completely eradicated from the Urals — thereby unfortunately providing a weapon for the US hawks to "call into validity [the bacteriological weapons] convention" and to "whip up the arms race".

Vera Rich