

plants which then have to be bedded out with a sufficient number of males (the plant is wind pollinated.) With the problem of falling manpower, and the desire to make all agriculture more productive per man-hour, widescale introduction of the jojoba could pose considerable problems of organization.

Vera Rich

### Pneumoconiosis unit

## Dusty answers

Members of the staff at the British Medical Research Council's Pneumoconiosis Unit in Cardiff are alarmed about the unit's future. So too are the National Union of Mineworkers, the Agricultural Workers' Union and the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, who say that they value highly the unit's work on industrial diseases. Their fears have been roused by a routine review of the unit's work, conducted by a subcommittee of the council's Physiological Systems and Disorders Board, which has apparently suggested changes at the unit. Last week, council employees and union representatives lobbied a meeting of the council at which the recommendations were to be discussed.

According to the lobbyists, the review has recommended that the unit should continue with most of its present work until a further review in 1987, but that its value should be measured increasingly by the number of contracts for research that it manages to win from industry. They also say that the review has recommended that targets be set for reductions in staff levels, that some work on allergic responses and lung function be relocated and that the unit should not receive a new high-voltage electron microscope, a replacement radiographer nor a replacement respiratory physiologist.

The subcommittee's review is a routine 3-year assessment, to which the work of all council units is subjected. Such reviews frequently lead to decisions to close some units and open others. What seems to have worried the Cardiff staff is that running down some of the work now may pave the way for closing the unit after 1987, when the present director and several other senior staff are due to retire.

Representatives of those lobbying the council's headquarters last week presented their case to the industrial liaison officer who distributed their statements among council members. Their arguments are that relocating some of the unit's work will undermine the multidisciplinary approach needed for many problems and that, by whittling away at the unit's structure now, the council may cause it to become unworkable before formal consultations on steps towards closure can be taken.

The Medical Research Council refused last week to discuss the report of the review committee or the future of the unit. It has still to inform the unit of the decision of the council meeting.

Judy Redfearn

### Bulgar birthday

## Two for one

"Bulgaria-1300", the unmanned space probe planned as a highlight of the country's 1300th anniversary of statehood, will now consist of two satellites. The first, Bulgaria-1300/1, will be equipped entirely with Bulgarian apparatus, and will carry out ionosphere and magnetosphere investigations. The second, Bulgaria-1300/2, will carry both Bulgarian and Soviet apparatus including several remote sensing experiments, using infrared and VHF wavelengths, and also a special Bulgarian-made multichannel camera. The experiments on Bulgaria-1300/2 will be combined with observations from a high-altitude aircraft and collated with terrestrial measurements.

No details of the experiments have yet been announced. However, according to Dr Kiril Serafimov, chairman of the Bulgarian National Committee for Space Research and Utilization, Bulgaria's "historical circumstances" are such that Bulgarian teams can take part in all five areas of space physics covered by the Comecon joint "Interkosmos" programme — space physics, meteorology, communications, biology and medicine, and remote sensing. New Bulgarian ideas, developed within Interkosmos, stated Dr Serafimov, have included Langmuir probes, ion traps and electrophotometric telescopes. During the past few years, his teams have paid particular attention to noctiluscent clouds and have reported "very interesting data" concerning discharges of auroral type over the magnetic equator. A particular Bulgarian success has been the Spektr-15 multichannel camera, whose 15 channels compare favourably with Landsat's four channels and the East German MKF-6, which has six. (In addition Spektr-15 weighs only 15.2 kg as against the MKF-6 which weighs 158 kg.) The Spektr-15 will be a major feature of Bulgaria-1300/2.

So far, however, there have been no indications of any medical or biological experiments. This seems unfortunate, as the Bulgarian space medicine experiments scheduled for the visit of their Cosmonaut Georgi Ivanov to the Salyut-6 space station were abandoned when his Soyuz transport craft failed to link up with the station. (The other "Bulgarian" parts of the programme, such as the casting of aluminium "foam" using hydrogen as dispersant, were carried out by cosmonauts Lyaknov and Ryumin, who were already on board Salyut.) Nor are there any hints that Soviet birthday presents to Bulgaria will respond to the broad hints that the Bulgarian space planners have been dropping ever since Ivanov's mission was aborted — another, and this time more successful, flight of a Bulgarian cosmonaut. Other states have done better, but are not as old.

Vera Rich

### Reef aggregation

A new society and a new journal concerned with research on coral reefs have sprung from the frustrations of a group of interested scientists at the difficulties of funding this interdisciplinary work. The new society, called the International Society of Reef Studies, was formed after a meeting held at Churchill College, Cambridge last month.

The first president of the society is Dr D.R. Stoddart from the Department of Geography at the University of Cambridge, who was the leader of the Royal Society's expedition to the Indian Ocean island of Aldabra in the 1960s. The council of the society includes members from mainland Europe, North America, Australasia and the Far East.

One of the objectives of the society — to provide a forum of coral reef research — has been met by the proposed publication by Springer-Verlag of a quarterly journal, *Coral Reefs*, due to appear next year. The new journal will be more concerned with the structure and dynamics of coral reefs than with the flora and fauna, and will thus be complementary to the *Atoll Research Bulletin*, published by the Smithsonian Institution.

The society also plans to take over the management of the international symposia on the subject, of which the fourth is due to be held in Manila in May. Its formation illustrates the difficulties of recruiting funds for the support of research in fields that do not fall squarely within the terms of reference of established grant-making agencies, which have been acutely felt in Britain in recent years. Feeling has run high that governments are interested in coral reefs only in crises.

### Brazilian ecology

## Polluting by decree

### São Paulo

Economic pressures have caused the Brazilian government to postpone legislation banning the use of non-biodegradable detergents which was due to come into force in January 1981.

A decree signed by President Figueiredo last month puts back the starting date for the new law by two years. Industrial pollution is now a serious problem in Brazil. In the state of São Paulo all the rivers are biologically dead and the appearance of foam on rivers is now considered normal, according to the head of the Environmental Technology Agency. Several waste-treatment plants due to open in 1981 in São Paulo will have to be abandoned if the foaming persists.

Although the intended ban on non-biodegradable detergents was drafted four years ago, nothing was done to make it