

autonomy (academicians elect each other) conflicts with its function as an instrument of the state, with responsibility for administering public laboratories and, within the past year, committed to even more direct responsibility for running industrial research and development. The most obvious defect of this arrangement is that it is too reasonable, snuffing out the inevitable tension there must be between those with an interest in discovery (which is the basis of future industry) and those with an interest in current production.

The problem of the academy, unfortunately for Andropov, is not the last that calls for his attention. As in Britain, but more scandalously, there is too great a separation between civil and defence research. Only in the past few years has the Soviet space programme begun to make a bridge between the strictly secret activities of the army of defence researchers and those who serve the academy's institutes, the universities and the generality of public service. Socially and in economic terms, the relatively lowly status of the Academy of Medical Science (whose president N.N. Blotkin spoke after Aleksandrov at the funeral orations) may be unimportant, but the neglect of the Academy of Agricultural Science (whose president did not speak at all) cannot be irrelevant to Andropov's problems. Is it not time (and would it not be politically convenient) that Soviet citizens should for once be fed decently? Mr Andropov might, without disadvantage, ask the academy whose president was so much honoured on Monday why agricultural research has been so foolishly neglected. He may discover that he, like other comparable leaders, needs a mechanism by which loyal but free-minded scientists can tell him how resources should best be spent.

Unsolicited advice such as this is never welcome and often goes unread, not least by those to whom it is addressed. Others may ask why advice intended to be helpful (but likely to be overlooked) is proffered at all, in the present climate of East-West relations. There are two simple answers, which the West too often overlook. First, if the struggle (an Eastern word) between East and West is ideological, and if nuclear warfare can be avoided, engagement is preferable to detachment. Second, as both sides are fond of saying, science is international. So must not even the West be deprived by the diseconomies of Soviet science? From Artsimovich to Zeld'ovich, the West has profited from those the Soviet system has allowed to flourish: how much has it lost because so many others have been stifled?

## West Germany's millstone

*The new West German government seems ill prepared to tackle the problems of its universities.*

The long-standing legend of the free-floating German student, moving as the fancy takes him from one seat of learning to another, is appealing but no longer a joke. The West German academic system is at serious risk of being crippled by its students, not merely by the huge numbers of them but by their disinclination to distribute themselves among West German universities according to the distribution of qualified teachers. The result is that some places are overwhelmed with students and that others are half empty. In the circumstances, the vision among academic administrators that the impending decline in the teenage population will bring relief is almost certainly an illusion; more probably, the crowded universities will be just as crowded as at present, and the others even emptier.

Everybody knows that freedom of access to higher education is deeply valued in West Germany. It is also understandable that the Social Democrat government, which helped to institutionalize the doctrine of free access with a sequence of legislation going back to 1969, could hardly have set about devising some scheme for telling would-be students where they should study. Even the introduction of the *numerus clausus* in fields such as medicine was regarded by many of its supporters as a betrayal. The new government is not bound by earlier promises, but seems no more willing to make a fight for commonsense. Will it be different after the March elections?

## Ambition running cold?

*Last week's meeting of the European Science Foundation was a needless disappointment.*

The European Science Foundation is a remarkable organization, not a consortium of governments but an organization of publicly supported research agencies and learned academies which have agreed to contribute small (for them) sums of money to common good causes. At the outset, in 1974, there was nevertheless some reason for hoping that this shoestring organization would so command the loyalty of its customers (mostly working scientists), the fidelity of its members and the respect of their sponsors that it would have a chance of growing into an amalgam of a European academy and a grant-making organization. For the time being, however, that prospect had become too distant for comfort and good sense. Last week's general assembly (see page 207) was a poor augury for the future. The foundation has always been careful not to boast about its potential for the future, saying publicly that it had no ambitions to be more than a marginal institution. The message was appealing when it could be disbelieved. What has happened is that the foundation has begun behaving as if it were indeed a marginal institution. Why has this happened?

The temptation is to suppose that the shortage of money that now afflicts the members of the foundation has made them sour, but that is only half the truth. Domestic budgets are an excuse for parsimony, but not the cause of it. The underlying trouble, and the mainspring of the sourness apparently running through last week's meeting in Strasbourg is that the member organizations have become more inward-looking than they were nearly a decade ago. If that were not the case, they would surely have acknowledged the logic of their own laments at the prospect that good causes such as the fellowships and summer-school programme in brain and behaviour research will founder unless somebody finds another sponsor within two years, and have recognized that they had best dig deeper into their own pockets. If such a programme is acknowledged to be worthwhile, and if those who now contribute towards its cost through the European Science Foundation are to be believed when they say that they would contribute to the same programme under a different umbrella, why can they not see that they would be as well served, and the foundation in the process strengthened, if they made Strasbourg the channel for their largesse? The snag seems to be that the mood has changed. A decade ago, people were looking for pan-European institutions. Now they are more conscious of the respect that they can earn on the international scene by being themselves the sources of the small sums of money flowing into international enterprises.

The foundation should nevertheless not despair. Some of its difficulties are procedural — its own cumbersome ways of conducting business, for example, and constitutional problems among its member states, such as that which prevents Austria from contributing honest schillings to other people's running costs. The first of these could and should be removed by means such as those accepted last week, the second suggests that a treaty between governments might after all be preferable to the present clubbiness. The foundation should also seize on the opportunities that now abound for providing the scientific community with an understanding of the changes that are taking place within it. Even relatively simple questions, such as the amounts of money spent on different kinds of science in different countries (once tackled systematically by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) are now neglected. The changing demography of the academic profession throughout Europe, practical questions of the employment of scientists in different states or of the proper relationship between academic research laboratories and industry (the catchword "technology-transfer" applies) could with advantage be taken up. If European organizations are for the time being short of European spirit, the foundation had better find a bread-and-butter role to keep itself alive until the spirit waxes again.