

European/Soviet collaboration

Doubts surface

The Committee of the Council of the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) has failed to reach an agreement on the proposed renewal of its collaboration with the Soviet Union. The Soviet side is anxious for this collaboration to be extended, particularly in view of the construction of CERN's new electron-positron collider (LEP).

The lack of agreement among the committee about the renewal reflected the continuing concern about human rights in the Soviet Union, in particular the continuing repression of such "eminent scientists" as Dr Yuri Orlov and Academician Andrei Sakharov. Since 1978, when Orlov received a 12-year sentence, CERN has taken a special interest in his fate.

The CERN delegates reflect the differing views in the West on how far the human rights issue should be linked to decisions on scientific and trade cooperation. The United Kingdom delegate, for example, expressed a belief in the importance of collaboration in science, saying that Soviet participation in LEP experiments "would be of concrete benefit to the international scientific community", although admitting to concern at the "present record of the Soviet Union in relation to human rights".

The Italian delegation, however, felt that such a sensitive issue should be settled only with the approval of the wider scientific community. They urged, therefore, that a new cooperation protocol be drawn up for ratification by the CERN Council, whose proceedings are public, rather than simply by the committee in closed session.

The machinations of the CERN committee were undoubtedly influenced by the imminence of the Madrid Review Conference of the Helsinki Act, which reopened on 10 November. The CERN Orlov Committee was a co-sponsor, with the *Comités Scientifiques Françaises* and "Scientists for Sakharov, Orlov and Shcharanskii" (United States), of a special press conference in Madrid, designed to draw attention to the plight of their Soviet colleagues.

The death of Leonid Brezhnev, and the accession to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union of Yuri Andropov will inevitably evoke considerable rethinking of East-West scientific exchange. Although in his funeral oration on Monday, Mr Andropov expressed a commitment to detente and a willingness to cooperate with any country which genuinely sought cooperation, he also pledged support to the "strengthening" of socialist government at home and abroad, which could well lead to actions unacceptable to human rights lobbies in the West.

Vera Rich

French science research

Papon explains his plans

The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), the research council which dominates basic science in France, seems to have set off on the right foot with its new director-general, Professor Pierre Papon, who came to the post hot-foot from a political position at the ministry of research and industry in October.

Initially, some feared that Papon's close links with the ministry would increase political influence over fundamental research policy — but his first statement of position to the CNRS council a few days ago confirmed the continuity of his thinking with that of his predecessor, Professor Jean-Jacques Payan, and even hinted that CNRS may influence the government, rather than the reverse.

Papon explained that he had four main objectives to achieve: to create "a new dynamics" in CNRS science; to "open" CNRS to cultural, economic and social needs, and towards the international community and the Third World; to "democratize" decision-making; and to make CNRS "one of the main partners" of the government in the whole process of national science policy-making.

By "new dynamics" Papon means to create new areas of research and to stimulate others — such as general microbiology, or the neurosciences — which are not considered to be at a sufficiently high level in France. Also French science is often strictly compartmentalized, and Papon intends to help break these barriers and induce the movement of ideas and people by setting up new interdisciplinary programmes, such as the programmes on drugs

(PIRMED) and materials (PIRMAT).

Papon also wants to loosen the distinction between pure and applied research — although, he insists, "of course CNRS must remain 80 per cent basic". His guiding light is Jean-Frédéric Joliot, the Nobel-laureate radiochemist who was the first director of CNRS in 1944–45. "Joliot thought of applications of radioactivity in the 1930s, when Rutherford was dismissing it as a joke" said Papon, although a basic scientist, took out early patents on a primitive radioactive pile. He demonstrated that the pursuit of truth and profit are not incompatible.

As for "opening" CNRS to the outside world, Papon will create two new directorates, one to pursue the application of CNRS results in industry, and one to deal with information, publicity and international relations. Papon, a socialist, stresses his own interest in improving CNRS links with developing countries. But his policy here will be guided by French foreign policy.

The third line of Papon's policy, "democratization", he interprets as "complete transparency": decisions will still be taken by the directorate, but in the open, after wide debate.

The fourth line, making CNRS a partner in government policy-making, means essentially that Papon, with his strong political links and experience, will not hesitate to make positive science political proposals to the minister of research and industry — and other ministers. There will be no waiting meekly for the directives to come from above.

On other issues, Papon is convinced of the value of the 12-year-rule (see *Nature* 14 October, p.569, and 21 October, p.670) by which laboratory directors will have to resign their posts after 12 years in the job; and believes that Dr Maurice Godelier, an anthropologist who a year ago was bitterly opposed as potential director for the social sciences at CNRS, is now broadly acceptable to the social science community "as far as I can tell". Godelier's report on the social sciences in France (see *Nature* 28 October, p.771) is "a masterpiece", according to Papon, and generally agreed to be a good assessment. The appointment of a director for social science and humanities should be made in a few weeks, and although Papon would be happy to work with Godelier he would also accept "any open-minded person" in the job.

On the 12-year-rule, Papon believes it helps to know you have a finite time in which something concrete must be achieved. The only problem is with the smaller groups, set up around one scientist whose ability has been the *raison d'être* of the team. But the rule, as later qualified by the research and industry minister, leaves room for manoeuvre.

Robert Walgate

Good news for BAS

The Falklands War seems to have worked to the advantage of the British Antarctic Survey. The Department of Education and Science announced last week that it is to allocate an extra £4 million in 1983–84 in addition to the normal allocation expected from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). After a long period of tight budgets, this appears to be the beginning of an expanded commitment by the British towards Antarctic research. NERC's allocation to the survey for this year, £7.8 million, is already significantly more than last year's £5.6 million.

No reason was given for last week's announcement, and it is not yet known how the extra money will be spent. The Falkland Islands are used as a refuelling and supply base for Antarctic survey support ships. At present there is a numerically superior Argentinian presence in the Antarctic Peninsula, with 158 Argentinians (132 of them military personnel) and 58 British survey scientists.

David Millar