

## British polygraphy

## Getting into business

THE polygraph or lie detector has arrived in Britain. A recently established company, Polygraph Security Services Ltd, now offers polygraph tests as a means of combating employee theft, and boasts that in at least one case now pending, charges of theft have been brought after "identification" of a suspect with the polygraph. In another instance, a man who failed a polygraph test was later found to have previous undeclared convictions for theft and was consequently dismissed.

Directors of Polygraph Security Services recently appeared before the House of Commons Select Committee on Employment, which is conducting an inquiry into the implications of the polygraph for industrial relations. The company declined to identify its clients to the Commons committee, citing commercial confidentiality. The committee accordingly threatened to use its legal powers to obtain such information, and the company's directors are now taking legal advice.

The chairman of Polygraph Security Services is Sir George Terry, a former chief constable of Sussex police. The other directors are Mr Jeremy Barrett, Mr Philip Tite and Mr Martin Seligson. Tite and Seligson are directors of Triangle PD Ltd, a printing and publicity company, and Seligson is also a director of Beneficial Arts Ltd, a company which distributes films of horse races to social clubs for fund-raising events. Barrett is director of a market consultancy company. None of the directors has previous experience of polygraph tests. Their training has been through the Zonn Corporation in the United States, of which Polygraph Security Services describes itself as the United Kingdom extension.

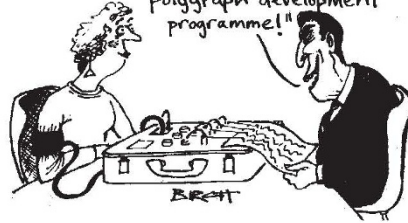
Seligson claims that with the polygraph, companies can cut employee theft by 80 per cent. Some client companies are already conducting tests on job applicants, and an existing workforce can be screened regularly through the "honesty maintenance programme" offered by Polygraph Security Services. Seligson stresses that all tests are voluntary, although it is unclear how such a screening programme could possibly be effective if a substantial proportion of the target group declines to be tested.

Seligson is unimpressed by the serious questions that have been raised about the reliability and efficacy of the polygraph. He says that Professor David Lykken, who wrote a critical article on polygraphic interrogation published in *Nature* in February (307, 681; 1984) is "totally debunked" and "generally discredited". The authority for this judgement is a paper by D.C. Raskin and J.A. Podlesny published in the *Psychological Bulletin* in 1979 (86, 54-59). The empirical issues separating those authors from Lykken boil down to what

sort of data is valid for an objective test of the polygraph's effectiveness. Lykken charges that Raskin relies on studies using pre-selected polygraph traces which had previously been scored "correctly" by a polygraph examiner, so providing evidence only that trained polygraphers tend to concur in their judgements.

UK polygraphers are not above circulating (non-attributably) rumours to the effect that Lykken administered or undertook to administer a polygraph test to Mr John de Lorean, now on trial in California, on behalf of de Lorean's defence lawyers. Lykken's version of this story is that the judge in de Lorean's case threw out all polygraph evidence after seeing two directly contradictory polygraph reports: one, from the Federal

"Congratulations! You've failed—you're a compulsive liar—utterly dishonest—just the person we need for our polygraph development programme!"



Bureau of Investigation, concluded that the accused was deceptive, while the other by Raskin concluded that de Lorean was truthful with 99 per cent probability. Lykken denies ever giving polygraph tests himself except as demonstrations, and says his total involvement with the case was one telephone call.

While Polygraph Security Services is already advertising its services in Britain, little is known about plans to introduce polygraph testing for those employees at the Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham who have access to highly classified material. The British Security Commission recommended last year, after a review of the Prime spy scandal, that polygraph testing should be considered for such employees. It is thought that about 20 senior Cheltenham personnel volunteered to take part in a pre-test of the polygraph in London, although some others may have declined. There are no longer any formal links between the majority of employees at the communications headquarters and the civil service unions, but there are not thought to be any immediate plans to extend the test. But, according to one account, it has already been decided in principle to make polygraph tests mandatory for all employees at Cheltenham during their probationary period, and for those with access to highly classified material at each quinquennial security review.

Tim Beardsley

## Summit science

## Leaders espouse collaboration

THE London summit last week gave an uncontentious blessing to a report of the Working Group on Technology, Growth and Employment—the gathering of senior government science advisers which owes its existence to President François Mitterrand's initiative at the Versailles summit two years ago. But the secret of the report's easy passage seems to have been that its references to contentious issues were cast in the most anodyne language.

On the perennial bone of contention between the United States and the six other summit countries—the control of Western technology by means of the strategic embargo—the report says only that strategic considerations have persuaded governments to seek to control technology and that, "nevertheless", the exchange of information and the encouragement of trade are necessary for the maintenance of technological innovation.

Dr Robin Nicholson, Chief Scientific Adviser at the UK Cabinet Office and *ex officio* chairman of the working group during this calendar year, explained earlier this week that the immediate objective had been to win the acknowledgement of governments that strategically inspired restraints on the free flow of information and products were a potential impediment to the pace of technological innovation. He said that the issue may be explored in greater detail at the two sessions of the group due to take place before the next summit, next year in West Germany.

Other impediments to innovation such as "non-tariff" barriers to international trade are also referred to in the report, which acknowledges that these often stem from the "wish of countries" to be self-sufficient in high technology. Nicholson is especially keen that the working group should encourage uniform and acceptable standards for the new technologies.

The working group's chief initiative since the Williamsburg summit a year ago seems to have been to urge the need for international cooperation on environmental problems, especially acid rain, radioactive waste disposal, the marine environment, the greenhouse effect and development of power sources free of potentially harmful emissions. The working group rejected the notion that these questions should be added to the list of eighteen projects mounted by the time of Williamsburg. Now the summit proper has asked for a detailed report and action plan by the end of this year.

The projects already begun under the auspices of the summit working group are a mixed bag, ranging from thermonuclear fusion, biotechnology and robotics to an attempt to explain people's resistance to new technology (in which the United