

rejected an offer of £15 to £50 a year according to grade—a rise of roughly 3.5 per cent which is just inside the Prices and Incomes Policy ceiling.

The union seems in no mood to continue negotiations with the universities. It argues that since 1966 its members have received only 4.4 per cent more pay and an offer of a further 3.5 per cent to last until April 1970. During that period the union says the average wage index has risen by 15.5 per cent, and people doing comparable work outside the universities have received rises of up to 14 per cent. In addition, the joint universities and union working party, which has been trying to hammer out new pay scales for all grades of technicians and minimum qualifications for the various grades, has made little headway after a year.

To further its claim, the union is to lobby MPs on April 21 and, after the national one-day strike, will hold a series of longer strikes at selected universities. As a start it has announced that 450 technicians at Imperial College, London, will strike on May 6–8, immediately before the college's open day. The college coyly says that the open day is not part of its recently launched appeal for £2 million, but just to keep the college in the public eye—which is a wise thing to do when trying to collect £2 million. Imperial College says it regrets the timing of the strike but has no intention of postponing the open day. Staff and graduate students in each department will have to do the best they can without their technicians.

That may be more than members of the Association of University Teachers feel able to do. The AUT, already bitter after its pay award and the lecture from the Prices and Incomes Board on the false criterion of wage comparability, cannot have been made happier by seeing the doctors, the Ford car workers and BOAC pilots all use the principle of comparability in successful pay claims. The association has sent a letter to its members advising them to do nothing that could be construed as breaking the technicians' strike. Whether the urge to teach or research will prove stronger than union solidarity remains to be seen, but it is significant that the technicians' union is one of the three unions with which the AUT has been holding exploratory talks to see if there is any benefit to be gained from cooperation or even merger. If AUT members appear as strike breakers, they will not make themselves popular with Mr Clive Jenkins's empire.

SRC REPORT

Enzyme Chemistry

Now that enzymes have established themselves in the washtub—to the surprise of many enzyme chemists—it is clearly time to look more deeply into the commercial possibilities of these natural catalysts. This is just what is done in a new Science Research Council report, *Enzyme Chemistry and Technology*, compiled by a distinguished panel of specialists within the enzyme field.

The report is a model of its kind. It conveys in a vivid way the conviction that both our understanding of enzymes and our ability to make use of them in industry and medicine are due for a phase of dramatic growth. The near future may even see development beyond this, for in the words of the report: "The

study of the structure of enzymes and of the mechanism of enzyme action is also leading to a greater understanding of the basis of catalysis itself. In some ways enzymes provide ideal model systems for the study of the molecular details of catalytic reactions, and the rational design of specific catalysts is not nearly as remote as it appeared only a decade ago. A new era in pure and applied chemistry will be at hand when man can control specific catalysis."

Despite this promise, Britain is beginning to lag behind the USA, Japan and Sweden in enzyme technology, and to some extent in academic enzyme research also. The report recommends that SRC support for the field should grow from its present level of £200,000 per annum to between £400,000 and £500,000 per annum. The SRC has announced its acceptance of the proposal. It is willing to award up to £300,000 in research grants in 1969–70, if applications of sufficient promise are received. A new committee—the Enzyme Chemistry and Technology Committee—will assess grant applications and allocate research studentships. Professors Sir Ewart Jones, G. W. Kenner, H. L. Kornberg and D. C. Phillips have already agreed to serve on this committee.

More specific recommendations are that a 220 MHz nuclear magnetic resonance machine should be available somewhere in Britain chiefly for enzyme work, that facilities for isolation of enzymes on the gram scale should be extended and that the industrial potential of enzymes as catalysts should be explored vigorously. The report is not happy with the idea of a central enzyme research institute, and with good reason. The essence of growth in a field of this sort is flexibility, which is more likely to be achieved in changing patterns of collaboration between groups which already exist than in a new hierarchic institute. The committee expects the number of staff concerned with enzymes to double in the next two or three years, but this presents no problem of supply. Most of the personnel will probably be seconded from other less expanding fields.

The report does not neglect the medical promise of enzymes. They are already the mainstay of the clinical biochemistry laboratory, both as analytical reagents and as parameters in diagnosis. But their main potential is a future rational chemotherapy. It is hoped that detailed knowledge of the active site chemistry of enzymes will make possible the design of enzyme-specific inhibitors, tailor-made for any desired medical purpose.

SRC REPORT

More Money for Polymers

POLYMER science is soon to get a much needed boost. The Science Research Council Polymer Panel, in its report published last week, recommends increased grants for research and training and the formation of the new Polymer Committee. For more than a year now the SRC University Science and Technology Board has been selecting important areas of science and technology which it considers deserve special support. The polymer report is the third to be published; the first was on organometallics (*Nature*, 221, 616; 1969) and the second on enzymes (see this page).

It is ironic that the practical importance of polymer