

Six weeks after the new Australian-Soviet science agreement was initialled in Canberra, it has been revealed that the Russian delegation which finalised these arrangements proposed at the same time that 'a joint scientific facility' be established in Australia. Although this was essentially a renewal of a previous proposal in 1971, the recent press stories caused a flurry of comment in the Parliament and diplomatic circles. There was reportedly a reaction from the United States Ambassador who was said to be concerned that the proposed 'facility' could be a threat to the various American defence bases in Australia.

Of these, two are in the big league—the naval communications base at North-West Cape (Western Australia) and the military satellite station at Pine Gap in the centre of the continent. A security screen surrounds the operations of these stations and there was immediate speculation that the Russians were 'trying out' Australia's diplomatic commitment to the American alliance by indirectly setting up a facility which could conceivably also act as an electronic monitor of American activities.

## Russians seek joint facility in Australia

*Peter Pockley, Sydney*

Both the Prime Minister, Mr Gough Whitlam, and the Foreign Minister, Senator Don Willesee, were, however, at pains to emphasise that no decision had yet been made and that the proposed facility—to be managed jointly by both nations—would be 'to photograph space objects and to contribute to atmospheric studies'. It is not, as reported by some news agencies, intended to be a tracking station. The proposal is now being studied by various departments before Mr Whitlam's planned visit to Moscow in the middle of the year.

For readers in the Northern Hemisphere, who have become accustomed over decades to continual contact with the Soviet Union of a military and diplomatic kind, the sharp Australian reaction to such an apparently mild proposal may seem excessive. But, rare

though it is in the Southern Hemisphere, even remote possibilities of direct influence by the Soviet Union on events here have always been greeted by over-reaction.

The most celebrated example in recent times was the case of Vladimir Petrov, a Russian diplomat-cum-spy operating out of Canberra, whose defection in 1954 was turned to long lasting political advantage over his Labour opponents by the then Prime Minister, Mr Robert Menzies. The first Russian scare occurred, rather extraordinarily, in the Crimean War when the new settlers actually built harbour forts in a show of self-reliant bravado against the imaginary invaders from the steppes.

The present concern has been a two-day political wonder but it has its roots in the fears of a possible buildup of Soviet naval power in the Indian Ocean on Australia's undefended western seaboard of about 2,000 miles. As with the Australian-Soviet science agreement itself, this latest matter was treated by politicians and press alike as primarily a diplomatic affair, with science as the passenger in the vehicle.

Honeywell's present lines and those of the erstwhile computer arm of General Electric (USA) which Honeywell took over three-and-a-half years ago. At that time Honeywell and General Electric actively marketed 10 computer series, 20 processors and 12 software systems—now there are just four, eight and six. The largest of the new series, Level 66 is based on the Honeywell Series 6000 which has brought in about \$1,000 million since it was launched in 1971.

The development costs for the new series have hardly been trivial; most of the \$50 million earmarked for development by Honeywell in each of the past three years has gone on the Series 60, and much of the development work was done in Europe. (Level 66 computers are, indeed, to be manufactured at the Honeywell factory in Newhouse, Scotland.)

Honeywell says that the Series 60 will be suited to existing computer users and newcomers alike. Prices for Level 66 systems start at £450,000—of £10,000 a month on a rental basis—but Honeywell do have relatively small companies and organisations in mind for the less sophisticated Level 61 which costs £22,000+£400+a month). Honeywell is using the phrase 'attack machines' to describe the Level 61, for it sees many potential customers buying this as their first computer, possibly to do such mundane jobs as stock control.

## Cash problems for public interest law

*Colin Norman, Washington*

SINCE they first rose to prominence in the late 1960s, public interest law firms have made an impressive contribution to the development of government policies in the United States, ranging from the regulation of food additives to the protection of the environment. Staffed by a handful of lawyers and supported chiefly by philanthropic organisations, they have provided the cutting edge of the environmentalist movement and in many cases have formed an effective counterforce to the big business lobby which traditionally dominates the Washington political scene.

But they are now facing the prospect that one of their largest single sources of funding, the Ford Foundation, may withdraw its support in the next couple of years and put its money elsewhere. Ford has been pumping millions of dollars into public interest law since the 1960s, and since it traditionally provides seed money for the establishment of projects, rather than financial support over long periods of time its withdrawal from the field has long been anticipated.

Some idea of the influence of the foundation on the field of public interest law can be gauged from the fact

that it provides between 85 and 90% of the budget of the Center for Law and Social Policy, the law firm which was in the forefront of the legal battle against the trans-Alaska pipeline and which have been effective in setting standards for treatment of the mentally retarded. The foundation also contributes some 40% of the operating funds of the Natural Resources Defense Council, which has won several landmark court victories against the Environmental Protection Agency and which argued the law suit which eventually forced the Atomic Energy Commission to publish an environmental impact statement on the liquid-metal fast-breeder reactor programme.

Faced with such the prospect that their funds may dry up, many of the law firms are exploring possible new financial arrangements which will put their activities on a sounder footing and provide them with a more permanent source of funds.

Two recent events have brought the matter to a head. The first is that last week the Ford Foundation announced that it will provide four of the largest firms with \$2.3 million to finance their activities at least until the end of 1975, but it accompanied the announcement with the statement that Ford's role after the grants expire "cannot be determined now". And the second is that the Ford Foundation itself convened a conference in San Diego in