As a result, a number of sites will be closed "in due course", some "as soon as possible" but most within five to seven years. They include the Chemical Defence Establishment outstation at Nancekuke in Cornwall, reportedly associated with the development of nerve gas and CS riot gas; future levels of research and development on "defence against chemical and biological warfare", carried out at the parent Chemical Defence Establishment and the Microbiological Research Establishment (both at Porton), are to be reviewed "with the object of making significant economies". They also include the Admiralty's engineering, oil and materials laboratories, and one site of another of the Admiralty's laboratories, as well as a site of the Explosives Research and Development Establishment. In addition, there will be "a further cut on extramural research with industry and the universities where for the time being we shall have to sacrifice some of the longer-term work". Concentration of activities in the field of explosives will enable the work of closed sites to be carried out at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment and the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment. Other work will be concentrated as a result of the naval laboratory closures. Redundancies are inevitable, and could amount to many hundreds.

The underlying aim of the rationalisation is to complete "the framework of a research and development organisation based on four main systems establishments—sea, land, air, and underwater—complemented and supported by a number of technology establishments". The aim, in other words, is similar to the comparable one in the civilian area which the Rothschild White Paper foreshadowed, namely, better and more efficient co-ordination of government-backed scientific research and development. While the cuts in defence appear to be encouraging the pace of such a ration-

alisation, though, the redeployment policy of the ABRC as implemented through the SRC is looking increasingly like an issue separable from the other main focus of the ABRC report, the more universal application of the "customer-contractor principle".

"Customer-contractor principle"

Government departments which act as regular "customers" for Councils to which they "contract" research are represented on both the relevant Councils themselves and the ABRC through the comparatively recent institutions of their own Chief Scientific Advisers (CSA). The "customer-contractor principle", outlined by Rothschild in respect of research and development conducted in accordance with objectives formulated by the departments themselves, has already been in operation for some time within the Ministry of Defence through its CSA; its contractor is the Procurement Executive. The principle should have been implemented within three years (that is, by next week) by certain other departments: thus, some of the funds previously lying with the ARC, MRC and the NERC (contractors) should by now have been transferred to their respective customer departments for the departments' own use, which could perhaps be outside the Councils through private research establishments.

The ABRC report is not discouraging about progress in this respect, at least regarding the ARC and MRC. But it acknowledges the complexity of the case of the NERC and its customers, which stems from the sheer diversity of its activity: "There will continue to be some difficulties", the report says, "to which the Council and probably the Board itself will need to give careful thought". But while the ABRC recognises these matters, it studiously avoids the related question of co-ordination amongst the CSAs themselves. That co-ordination, such as it is, is currently pursued largely through the ABRC itself, for at the

moment there is no CSA for the government as a whole: the last one, Sir Allan Cottrell, has not been replaced, and the presence on the ABRC of Sir Keith Berrill, head of the Central Policy Review Staff which advises the Cabinet on strategy, was affirmed as being in his personal capacity only.

These issues are not likely to disappear. But for the moment the main questions surround the government's financing of British scientific research. The country's research effort, while not a party issue, is a political issue insofar as it has to be resolved at the political level. At the moment, however, it manifests itself to the scientific community only as a matter to be rather mechanically resolved at Research Council and ABRC level, and is largely a question of slicing up a financial pie whose size is fixed by Treasury *diktat*. Not only is the size of the pie itself not a major object of contention; the manner in which it is sliced was, as Sir Fred Stewart vigorously insisted last week, the product of consensus. The degree to which the claims of participants in the various branches of scientific research are recognised is unclear, but, in the case of the budget handled by the SRC, it is not obvious that its size, both absolutely and in relation to the other Councils, is an issue thoroughly discussed any lower than the SRC itself.

Thus, whether or not it is true, as the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology recently argued, that SRC funds are directed largely at the behest of a small charmed circle of scientists, it seems clear that that alleged circle may now be losing (if indeed it is conducting) any fight to preserve the share of total funds it has quietly thought itself entitled to in the past. The difficulty, of course, is that in a new nil-growth era, when even the country's defence effort is under scrutiny, Britain's scientists as a whole, like the rest of the country, will over the next few years be losing as well. □

USSR

Broom at the top

Following the disasters of Soviet agriculture during the last Five-year Plan, the USSR Minister of Agriculture Dmitrii Polyanskii has been relieved of his post. Polyanskii was not re-elected to the Politburo at the end of the recent Twenty-Fifth Party Congress, when his Ministry faced sharp criticism, notably from Aleksandr Lyashko, the Prime Minister of the Ukrainian SSR; he did, however, retain his seat on the Central Committee of the Party. Now his dismissal as scape-goat for his

Ministry appears to be a tacit acknowledgement that the criticisms were well-founded, and that more than "abnormal weather conditions" were responsible for the agricultural short-fall.

The new Minister of Agriculture, Valentin K. Mesyats, is a graduate of the Moscow Agriculture Institute. From 1965–1971, he was Minister of Agriculture of the Russian SFSR. Since then he has held the post of Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (one of the Republics most involved in the Virgin Lands scheme). He is a Member of

the Central Committee, but not a member of the Politburo.

Two newcomers to the Politburo fill the places left by the departure of Polyanskii and the 80-year-old Anastas Mikoyan. They include Dmitrii Ustinov, who has for some 10 years been closely connected with the Soviet's armaments programme, including nuclear arms and missiles. This appointment gives two seats on the 16-man Politburo to military interests—the other being held by Minister of Defence Marshal Andrei Grechko.

Vera Rich