

United Kingdom

Ex-energy secretary criticises decision-making

FORMER UK Secretary of State for Energy, Mr Tony Benn, has broken the unwritten rules on public exposure of parliamentary procedures by giving an extended interview to Granada television (*World in Action* shown on 7 January) about key decisions taken during his 11 years as a senior Cabinet Minister. According to *World in Action* reporters, Whitehall officials have refused to respond to his criticisms on the grounds that he is breaking a long standing tradition that disputes should be kept behind closed doors.

Mr Benn cites five important issues on which, as the person in charge of Britain's nuclear programme, he was either not informed, misinformed or actively opposed by government bureaucrats.

The 1978 AGR-PWR decision: Benn favoured the British designed advanced gas cooled reactor (AGR) over the US designed pressurised water reactor (PWR) — of the type that failed at Harrisburg — on the grounds of safety. He told *World in Action* that he asked his civil servants to prepare a Cabinet paper in favour of the AGR. Instead, in conjunction with industrialists like Sir Arnold Weinstock of the General Electric Company who had

obtained the UK license to build PWRs, they argued that the PWR had better export potential to countries like Iran. His department, he claims, then refused to help his political advisors prepare a brief in line with his views, and the Central Policy Review Staff (think tank) circulated a paper to other ministers directly opposing them. In this case Benn won the argument in favour of AGRs because he "was also making great efforts to see that other ministers knew what this battle was about."

The major Windscale leaks: In 1976, during discussions of expansion of the Windscale nuclear reprocessing facility, Benn heard about the major silo leak from the newspapers. In March last year, he responded to the 30,000 curie-300rem/hr sump leak by calling for a public inquiry in spite of what he describes as "intense political pressure" by the bureaucrats.

The UK-Namibian uranium deal: In 1970, officials in the Department of Energy approved contracts to let the UK nuclear industry obtain uranium from the Rossing mine in Namibia. Namibia was illegally occupied by South Africa and the Labour Government had insisted that it be

informed before any contract was signed. The cabinet was not informed of the department's action by what Benn describes as a frequent bureaucratic ploy. Signed contracts are placed in "one or two or perhaps three red boxes a night" without drawing the ministers attention to their importance.

The 1968 theft of 200 tonnes of uranium from Euratom: The theft, from the ship Sheerbourg, bound for Genoa from Antwerp by presumably Israeli agents, was not reported to Benn when he was Energy Secretary on the grounds that Britain was not a member of Euratom.

The Russian Kyshtym nuclear disaster in the 1950s: This was not made public until 1977, although Benn claims that the information was known to the CIA who passed it on to the UK Atomic Energy Authority. The UKAEA did not tell Benn about the accident because, he claims, it feared that the accident "might throw doubt upon the safety of nuclear operations worldwide."

Benn feels that the only remedy to "the state within the state" is to expose the operation of government to public debate.

Joe Schwartz

NEWS IN BRIEF**Japan produces enriched uranium**

THE Japanese government announced on 26 December that it had produced enriched uranium from its own factories. Previously, Japan has relied on the US for its supplies of enriched nuclear fuel. A factory in Ningyotoge in the western part of the country has produced 300 kg of uranium with a 3.2% concentration of ^{235}U the fissionable isotope of uranium. (^{235}U has a natural abundance of 0.72%). By 1981 the country is expected to produce 50 tonnes of enriched fuel annually. The uranium will be used to fuel Japan's rapidly expanding nuclear programme which envisages the construction of an additional 15 power plants in the next five years, a doubling of present capacity. Enriched uranium at this level can also be used to construct fission bombs.

Evidence on laboratory animals invited

A UK House of Lords select committee which will consider revision of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876 has invited written evidence from interested individuals and organisations on current practices in the use of laboratory animals. The committee seeks answers to three questions:

- Is present law and administration for controlling the number and use of laboratory animals unsatisfactory?
- If present law needs amendment, what changes ought to be made?
- Does the proposed House of Lords Laboratory Animals Protection Bill meet the need for reform?

Evidence should be sent before 24 January 1980 to the Clerk, Select Committee on the Laboratory Animals Protection Bill, House of Lords, London SW1 0PW.

Neurochemistry society wins action

THE International Society of Neurochemistry has won its legal action against Pergamon Press to prevent it from continuing to publish a journal with the same name as the society's journal. The dispute arose when the society moved the *Journal of Neurochemistry* from Pergamon to Raven Press earlier this year. After completing a ten year contract with Pergamon, the society sought another publisher because of dissatisfaction with Pergamon's "long publication times" and the "inadequacy of its accounting procedures". Pergamon had insisted that it had the right to publish a journal of the same name and had sent a mailing to sub-

scribers calling for continued subscription to the journal. It had also held back 50 manuscripts whose copyright is held by the society and had refused to release the subscription list. Pergamon now will hand over the subscription list and the unpublished manuscripts and will refrain from publishing any journal under the title "Journal of Neurochemistry". The society now will seek recompense for the 800 non-renewed subscriptions due to the dispute and for its costs in communicating with subscribers about the dispute.

Former Volvo director appointed head of ESA

THE Council of the European Space Agency appointed Mr Erik Quistgaard to the post of Director General at its 19 December meeting. Mr Quistgaard, aged 58 and a Danish national, graduated as a mechanical engineer (MSc) from the Technical University, Copenhagen. He spent three years with the Chrysler Corporation in the US and was General Manager and later director of Volvo in Sweden. After leaving Volvo he became Managing director of Odense-Lindo Stalskibsvaerft A/S, the Danish shipbuilding firm. Quistgaard will replace ESA's present director, Mr Roy Gibson, on 15 May 1980.