

NEWS IN BRIEF

East-West "persecution" row at Hamburg Forum

USSR Academician Nickolai Blokhin has accused the US and UK of "trying to make a 180 degree turn" in discussing international scientific cooperation and "interfering in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union". Speaking at the Hamburg Scientific Forum this week, Blokhin, head of the Soviet delegation and president of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR, accused them of "trying to be teachers of other countries when no-one asked them to". He was reacting to strong appeals from Lord Todd, head of the UK delegation and president of the Royal Society, and Dr Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, on behalf of persecuted colleagues. Lord Todd cited the Soviet Union's behaviour in blocking invitations to scientists to go abroad, and the harsh treatment meted out to scientists "for comparatively minor disagreement with authority".

"Does the Soviet government yet realise", he said "the resentment this causes amongst young scientists? I call on our Soviet colleagues to impress on their government the urgent need for change".

Dr Handler stressed that many Soviet scientists were victimised owing to their wish to monitor the Helsinki Accords. There had been, he said "a spontaneous upswelling of reaction in the US." His delegation was present in Hamburg in spite of many high level scientists' appeal for a boycott.

Blokhin did not answer the charges specifically, but harangued the Forum with a long list of Soviet scientific achievements which he said the US and UK were trying to deny. It had been expected the Soviet delegation would be led not by him but Dzherman Gvishiani, deputy head of the State Committee for Science and Technology.

US probes illicit Soviet technology sales

THE US Department of Commerce is currently investigating numerous cases of illicit sales of computer, laser and transistor technology to the Soviet Union, according to a document leaked to the *Los Angeles Times*. Although black market sales in high technology to the USSR and the socialist countries has existed for years, this is the first time the government has attempted to document its extent and significance. Citing such procedures as the creation of dummy firms, hand carried shipments without export licenses, and shipments made to illegal destinations, the document lists more than a dozen US companies who have engaged in this profitable but shady trade. Included are such small companies as I I Industries and

Kasper Instruments in California's Silicon Valley, which pleaded guilty in 1975 to diverting \$330,000 of semi-conductor equipment to the USSR by way of dummy firms in Canada, and Information Magnetics Corporation of Goleta, California, which shipped \$880,000 worth of computer supplies to Bulgaria through a UK subsidiary. Larger firms named in the document include Texas Instruments of Stafford, Texas, Tektronix Incorporated of Beaverton, Oregon, and Hewlett Packard of Palo Alto, California.

California gives major boost to solar energy

A major boost to the US solar energy industry has been given by a ruling from California's Public Utilities Commission that the state's four largest publicly-owned utilities must finance the installation of solar water heaters in 175,000 homes over the next three years.

The utilities — Pacific Gas and Electric Co., Southern California Edison Co., Southern California Gas Co., and San Diego Gas and Electric Co. — have been told to produce plans within 60 days for various types of low interest loans to solar-home owners.

Industry officials estimate that the commission's ruling will increase by more than five times that number of homes in the US with solar-assisted water heating. The plans still require further approval by the commission, and will be the subject of public hearings, but the PUC has indicated that it intends to achieve a major breakthrough in the acceptance of solar power by consumers.

"Certainly there isn't any question the PUC order is the biggest thing to happen to solar power", said Mr Edward A Myers, vice-president of Southern California Edison. Another utility official claimed that, as far as solar energy was concerned in California, "whether it is economically competitive really doesn't matter any more".

Average cost of installing the solar heaters is expected to be about \$2,500 for each house for equipment which would provide 50 to 70% of the energy needed for hot water.

First geothermal plant in Holland

THE FIRST geothermal project, part of a larger 32 million guilder energy research and development programme has been started in Holland. Fifty houses in Spijkenisee, a Rotterdam suburb, will be connected in 1982 to a heating system which will circulate water at 100°C from 3000 metres underground. A unique aspect of the system is an interim storage procedure that will hold the water at a

depth of 600 metres during the summer months when demand is less. An estimated equivalent of 12-25% of Dutch natural gas reserves is available in geothermal energy. The most favorable source is in the south of the country where studies carried out since 1974 have shown gradients of 40-50° per 1000 metres of depth. **Caspar Schuurings**

US pays radiation exposed veterans

NINETEEN war veterans who were deliberately exposed to radiation from bomb tests in Nevada in the 1950s as part of a programme to show that the US fully intended to use its nuclear capability are receiving disability payments for cancer. But the great majority of 493 veterans who have filed claims for cancer contracted as a result of the tests have been turned down. Ten cases were awarded benefits and an additional nine were won on appeal but the Army denied the remaining 386 applications. Other cases are still pending.

UK nuclear inspectorate understaffed

THE UK's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is facing increasing difficulty in meeting its obligations because of government spending cuts. Present staffing is 15% below full complement (17 vacancies out of 104 positions), and recruitment has proved difficult because industrial salaries are 30% higher and because of the Inspectorate's threatened move from London to Lancashire. In addition there are fears that the Health and Safety Executive may be forced to impose non-nuclear duties on its nuclear staff because of the impact of recent budget cuts. Nuclear inspectors are highly specialised and must be qualified engineers with 10 years' industrial experience. Mr Roger Gausden, Chief Inspector, has admitted in the NII's biennial report that "it has not proved possible to recruit the required additional staff to deal with all the tasks facing the Inspectorate".

University of Edinburgh rescinds "six year rule"

THE University of Edinburgh has rescinded its rule preventing the rehiring of untenured members of research staff after six years. Citing opposition to the "rigidity" of the rule, a report by a university working party last week said that "research staff are in the best position to make the decisions individually". The report cautions, however, that heads of departments should not make any "unjustified commitments". The "six year rule" has been rescinded "despite the fact that there now appears to be a tendency to adoption of a similar rule by some research