

Albanian science

Isolated still

Albania is embarking on its own characteristically isolated programme of science and technology. At the two-day plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Albanian Workers' Party last month, the main theme was the need to increase the level of scientific research and to apply research and development more effectively for the development of the country.

The issue is timely. The five-year plan (1981-85) now being prepared includes increases of industrial and agricultural production of 40-42 per cent. But with the departure of the Chinese, "self-reliance" has become the order of the day. Addressing the plenum, Ramiz Alia of the Party's Political Bureau paid a glowing tribute to the Albanian "specialists,

technicians and workers" who had had to take over the various technological projects left unfinished when the Chinese quit.

According to Alia, Albania is now able to design and set up "self-reliantly" every object the economy needs, whether "industrial, hydrotechnical, railway or cultural". Self-reliance is also to be the watchword for the future. In the natural sciences, he stressed the need for research in applied nuclear physics and the mastering of neutron and laser technology for both industrial and military use. Research projects in biophysics should also, he said, be started.

On the applied side, Alia emphasized the importance of water management; he said that 52 per cent of the arable land in Albania is now irrigated — the highest proportion in Europe. Alia also called for strains of wheat capable of producing 70 to 80 quintals per hectare, an increase of 10 to 15 per cent compared with existing hybrids.

Alia said that fundamental work was needed to reach the target of 95 per cent extraction of useful minerals.

The first Secretary of the Central Committee of Albania, Enver Hoxha, in his closing address to the plenary session, put the Party's demand in more general terms. Albania, he said, has now reached an advanced stage of economic and social development, so that what is now required of science is "a generalization, improvement and an entire positive transformation in practice and theory — a qualitative break, a revolution in production technique, technology or organization". Technological advance, however, must not be accompanied by a drift from agriculture. Development of the agricultural sciences and the intensification of agricultural production is aimed at maintaining the current demographic distribution, in which some two-thirds of the Albanian population live in the countryside.

Vera Rich

CORRESPONDENCE

Cruel Malthus

SIR, — Peter Laslett¹ does injustice, I believe, to British social science in stating that, except perhaps for John Maynard Keynes, "Thomas Robert Malthus may be quite justifiably called . . . the most important of all English-speaking social scientists". From the "population principle" which Malthus claimed² to have "established in the first six pages" of his 1798 *Essay*, Malthus concluded that poverty was caused primarily by the "vices" of the poor themselves.

Accordingly, "to assist the poor in such a manner as to enable them to marry as early as they please and rear up large families is a physical impossibility³". Ferociously consistent, this mild-mannered cleric and professor advocated abolition of the poor laws which sheltered, though inadequately, the helpless poor. He opposed repeal of the corn laws, universal suffrage, and a regularly meeting representative parliament.

Malthus's stature as a social scientist may be judged from his pronouncement⁴ that "The structure of society in its great features will probably always remain unchanged. We have every reason to believe that it will always consist of a class of proprietors and a class of labourers." Yet his doctrine, which was born during the French Revolution, has surfaced repeatedly in various guises at times of social stress.

This recurrence is not particularly surprising. Malthus himself stated the political utility of his "principle" quite baldly in later editions of the *Essay*⁵.

"Among the poor themselves, its effects would be still more important. That the principal and most permanent cause of poverty has little or no *direct* relation to forms of government or the unequal division of property; and that as the rich do not in reality possess the *power* of finding employment and maintenance for the poor, the poor cannot in

the nature of things possess the *right* to demand them, are important truths flowing from the principle of population which when properly explained would by no means be above the most ordinary comprehension.

"And it is evident that every man in the lower classes of society who became acquainted with these truths would be disposed to bear the distresses in which he might be involved with more patience; would feel less discontent and irritation at the government and the higher classes of society on account of his poverty; would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence; and if he received assistance either from any public institution or from the hand of private charity, he would receive it with more thankfulness, and more justly appreciate its value.

"If these truths were by degrees more generally known . . . the lower classes of people as a body would become more peaceable and orderly, would be less inclined to tumultuous proceedings in seasons of scarcity, and would at all times be less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications from knowing how little the price of labour and the means of supporting a family depend upon a revolution.

"The mere knowledge of these truths, even if they did not operate sufficiently to produce any marked change in the prudential habits of the poor with regard to marriage, would still have a most beneficial effect on their conduct in a political light; and undoubtedly one of the most valuable of these effects would be the power that would result to the higher and middle classes of society of gradually improving their governments without the apprehension of those revolutionary excesses, the fear of which at present threatens to deprive Europe even of that degree of liberty which she had before experienced to be practicable, and the salutary effects of which she had long enjoyed."

While Malthus's hopes for pacifying the "poorer classes" have not been conspicuously successful, the doctrine has found a new use in the post-war years, as the poor in the developing countries have raised demands on their erstwhile rulers. The Malthusian resurgence⁶ assuages the conscience of the "class of proprietors" in the rich countries and facilitates inaction by their governments.

Yours faithfully,

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Nuclear protest

SIR, — Your leading article of 19 June concerning nuclear power exemplified many of the elitist opinions of the scientific "community". It appears you would like the public to reach an understanding of "the niceties of nuclear power" similar to its understanding of the relation between salary rises and inflation. The simplistic view of the economy (salary rises cause inflation) that many people have been impressed on them by successive governments and the Tory press. Is this how you want the nuclear power debate to proceed?

Your arrogant suggestion that the willingness of people to demonstrate is sustained only by the division of "professional" opinion is insulting to the many demonstrators who have arrived at an anti-nuclear position after careful consideration of available information on all the aspects of nuclear power.

The "key to the future of nuclear power" does not belong with a small and self-interested clique of professionals; it belongs with society as a whole. The real trouble with the nuclear debate is not that it is too polite but that it centres on technical discussion while ignoring the political, for example, the proliferation of nuclear weapons that is already accompanying the proliferation of nuclear power, the setting up of an armed secret police force and the denial of trade union rights (which is one of the main political reasons for developing nuclear power, according to Thatcher). Hopefully, members of the public will continue to see through the "leave it to the experts" myth.

Yours faithfully,

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1. *Nature*, 285, 173 (1980).

2. 6th Ed., 2, 453.

3. 7th Ed., 479 (1872).

4. *ibid.*, 480.

5. *ibid.*, 479.

6. Grundfest, H., *Monthly Review*, 3, 247 (1951).