and one at 900 MW in 1982–83. But since then, Electricité de France has revised downwards its electricity demand projections for 1990. The new government's target of six 1,300 MW reactors and one 900 MW reactor is commensurate with the new projections.

More identifiably new are proposals for public and regional consultation over nuclear decisions, and the establishment of several new energy committees. But, in the end, power seems likely to rest firmly at the centre.

There will be an "observatoire de l'énergie" at the Ministry of Industry, to act as an information bank; a "regional energy agency" under each *Assemblée Régionale*; and adversary, representative local information commissions set up on each power station, reprocessing or fuel assembly site.

The regional energy agencies will also be representative — consisting mostly of elected members, together with some union, public and interest group representation — and their first enormous task will be to prepare a full regional energy plan. These councils will consider local economic, demographic and geographical factors and devise a plan of action — including a politics of information, research, development and financial support.

Other plans outlined are for the National Assembly to set up an office of technology assessment and for a permanent delegation for energy at the assembly, to consider matters of safety and security. The expert *Conseil Supérieur de la Sécurité Nucléaire* will be reinforced and its composition "modified".

On the remaining nuclear questions — reprocessing and the fast breeder — the French government is allowing itself only a little more time. Construction to double the capacity of the existing plant at Cap de la Hague is due to begin next March; and in the interim a special scientific commission will investigate all questions concerning reprocessing (including the poor functioning of the present plant), and report to government and parliament. Superphénix, the commercial demonstration fast reactor at Isère, will be started up; but decisions on the commercial development of the fast breeder will be deferred to 1984–85.

Meanwhile, Quilès and his many erstwhile followers in the socialist party feel let down. Although none goes quite as far as M. Michel Rocard, leader of a socialist party faction and previously a contender for the presidency. "What's happening to the party is an historical scandal" a Paris paper reported him as saying last week. "Never in the international workers' movement — including Lenin's time — has there been such an attempted internal putsch so cynical and so empty of principles." M. Rocard, it seems, was not referring solely to energy policy.

Robert Walgate

Keyworth takes on health risks

Washington

In a small but potentially significant realignment of Washington responsibilities, the new director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, Dr George (Jay) Keyworth, has agreed to be the chairman of a group which is being established to coordinate the scientific aspects of federal policy on safety, health and environmental regulation.

Under the Carter Administration, this coordination function was carried out by the Interagency Regulatory Liaison Group (IRLG). Chaired by the then administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Dr Doug Costle, IRLG provided a forum in which federal agencies could coordinate their efforts on common or overlapping problems. In 1979, for example, IRLG published a report on the scientific bases for identification of potential carcinogens and estimation of risks prepared by a working group with representatives of four regulatory agencies and headed by Dr Eula Bingham, then head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. This group agreed that any substance shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals should be treated as a potential human carcinogen.

The new heads of the regulatory agencies, appointed by Mr Reagan, have adopted a substantially different approach to their mandate, emphasizing ways of cutting back on health and environmental regulation rather than adding to it. They have decided to let IRLG disappear, but they have agreed to support a new group, provisionally entitled the Interagency Science/Health Coordination Group, chaired by the President's science adviser, Dr Keyworth.

Dennis Prager, OSTP's assistant director for life sciences and institutional relations, explained that the working group set up under Vice-President George Bush to look at ways of reducing the burden of regulation on private industry had recognized the need for both a scientific contribution their discussion and for continued interagency coordination, and had felt that "the best way to do that was to upgrade the interagency council and give it more clout by being chaired by Jay Keyworth." Mr Prager said that the group would be trying to strengthen the scientific basis for regulatory decisions and develop methods of risk assessment.

David Dickson

Conflicts of interest

Tighter controls

Washington

Leading research universities across the United States are suddenly having to tighten up the rules which cover potential conflicts of interest between the academic and commercial activities of individual research workers. Their efforts stem from the growing need to order the complex web of relationships caused by the rapidly increasing ties between university and corporate research efforts.

In most cases, the demand for tighter conflict-of-interest rules has come from within the universities. Two weeks ago, for example, the faculty council of Harvard University agreed to recommend to the full faculty a new set of procedures which would establish a Faculty Committee on Conflicts of Interest. If adopted, the procedures would, for the first time, require certain faculty members to disclose details of their outside commitments, as well as formally restricting such commitments to 20 per cent of their time.

There has also been pressure for stricter control from outside. In California a federally-funded public interest group, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), has demanded that research workers at the University of California should no longer be exempt from a law requiring all state officials to disclose their economic interests. Last Monday the

state's Fair Political Practices Commission agreed that CRLA's staff should look into alternative regulations for university employees.

The debate on how a scientist should strike a reasonable balance between his or her teaching and research commitments to the university and those as consultants for outside companies is not new to US academic life. However, it has been given a new twist by three particular elements.

Two spring directly from recent changes in federal policy. The first is a set of legislative measures, such as tax incentives and patent law reform, designed explicitly to tighten the links between the academic and the corporate world. The second is the growing squeeze on federal research funds, inevitably leading university scientists to seek corporate sponsorship with greater zeal.

At Harvard the need for new guidelines was highlighted last year when the university's president, Dr Derek Bok, made a proposal which he subsequently retracted — that the university should have an equity share in Genetics Institute, a company being established on venture capital funding by Dr Mark Ptashne, professor of molecular biology.

Harvard's new rules would require that faculty members consult with a new committee, chaired by the dean of the faculty of arts and sciences, about any activities that "seemed to present an unacceptable conflict of interest or commitment". These include cases where a

faculty member takes on executive responsibility for an outside corporation, makes use of unpublished findings from university research in outside projects, or takes to another location research which would ordinarily be carried out on campus.

University administrators are pains to point out that such guidelines will be interpreted flexibly. Dr Walter Gilbert, for example, has recently been given leave of absence to work as chief executive officer of the Geneva-based Biogen, but will be able to return to his post as professor of molecular biology at a later date.

Stanford University, which has more formal guidelines than most universities because of the involvement of its faculty members in the microelectronics industry, is also tightening them up. The faculty will meet next month to decide whether to adopt a set of proposals that would require any research worker to disclose the names of companies with whom he or she consults and the nature of the consultancy agreement to the appropriate dean or head of department.

The Stanford proposals, made public in the early summer, are also designed to ensure that neither faculty members nor the departments to which they belong should make fortunes from the licensing of patents; academics will usually receive a third of any profits, but departments will have to share with the university if their income exceeds a certain proportion of their budget.

A different, although closely related, set of issues has emerged at the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology (MIT), where Mr Edwin (Jack) Whitehead, founder and former president of Technicon Corporation and now the largest shareholder in Revlon which recently bought Technicon from him, has offered to build and endow an independent institute for research into molecular approaches to developmental biology (*Nature* 1 October, p.329) at a total cost of \$127 million.

Although strongly supported by the MIT administration, the proposal has generated considerable controversy among faculty members over the implications of the possible "dual allegiance" of the 20 new professors who would be appointed to the MIT faculty but have their salaries and research expenses totally paid for by the Whitehead Institute. At a meeting on 1 October during which several criticisms of the proposed arrangements were raised, faculty members called on the MIT administration to take their concerns into account in further negotiations.

Meanwhile conflict-of-interest concerns are even reaching the top ranks of the mass media. Mr Walter Cronkite, until recently anchorman of CBS's nightly evening news, announced on Friday that he was resigning as a director of Pan American Airways since this could conflict with his work on space topics for the new CBS science program *Cosmos*. Earlier this year Mr Cronkite withdrew from taking part in CBS's coverage of the first launch of NASA's space shuttle, a project for which Pan Am has contracts. **David Dickson**

University organization London gives up

The committee set up a year ago to devise a new structure for the University of London's non-medical schools is being scrapped. Last week, Professor Randolph Quirk, the university's new vice-chancellor, explained in a letter to Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer, the committee's chairman, that the worsening of the university's finances over the past 18 months made the committee's original brief virtually impossible. Since the committee produced its first discussion document last January, the university's financial prospects have changed from a 15–20 per cent cut in real income by the end of the decade to a 20 per cent cut over the next three years.

The response to the committee's interim recommendations last May was mixed. In particular, suggestions that Chelsea College should close and Bedford and Westfield colleges should merge met with protests. Academics may be relieved at the committee's demise, but their respite will be brief. Professor Quirk hopes that the subject review committees, which he set up last month to advise on resource allocation by January, will establish criteria on which the university can determine its future for itself. The review committees will assess the quality of teaching and research in biological, physical and engineering sciences, languages and social studies in all colleges of the university.

The Swinnerton-Dyer committee, however, has been asked to report by December on the university's central activities, including research and teaching institutes, the central library, unions and sports facilities and central administration. The idea is that the committee's work will form part of the information used to help allocate future resources.

Meanwhile, the university is still struggling with an even older problem — that of rationalizing its medical schools. The recommendation in early 1980 of a working party chaired by Lord Flowers that London's 34 medical institutes be merged into six large schools was protested at more strongly than the Swinnerton-Dyer proposals.

Lord Flowers' grand plan has since been superseded by piecemeal decisions on the fate of individual schools. Hence St George's Hospital Medical School is to increase its intake of preclinical students from 200 to 250 by 1985, the preclinical courses at Westminster and Charing Cross Hospital medical schools are to merge, the Royal Free Hospital Medical School is to remain much as it is and Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital Medical Schools are to merge.

Later this month, university officials will meet to discuss whether to merge the three large medical schools in north central London — St Mary's, the Middlesex and

Solidarity for university freedom

The transformation of the Polish free trade union Solidarity into a multilateral social movement was completed at its first congress in September–October. The congress in Gdansk discussed a wide range of proposals and programmes and in particular called for a new approach to education, involving "social control" over the whole educational process.

The formal resolution derives from the report of a special working group which, among other things, advocated liberalization and self-government in higher education, an end to censorship and free access to the works of Polish scholars living abroad.

It also called for university and research finances to be effectively under the control of "academic and social milieux". Scientific exchanges with foreign scholars should be increased, and more funds made available for the purchase of books and learned journals from abroad. Just how this could be accomplished in Poland's present economic crisis is hard to see — although Solidarity does, of course, have its own proposals for economic recovery.

One interesting suggestion is that a new system of "social funding" of research

and higher education should be developed, in parallel with the government sector. On the Polish Academy of Science which, it is suggested, is too isolated from the rest of the academic community, the group advocated the removal of all "barriers" with the academic community, with the understanding that scholars working for the academy should be able to give lectures and seminars for students.

The group also asks that the status and authority of scholars should be restored by solving the "personnel problem" in various universities, a reference to those academics who owe their positions to patronage rather than academic prowess. Academic degrees should be awarded by competent scholars who enjoy the full trust of their fellows — without, it is implied, the possibility of government or party influence.

The most startling proposal raised by the working group, however, is that Solidarity should found its own private university in Szczecin, taking as a precedent the Catholic University of Lublin. On this point, however, the working group failed to reach a consensus, and the proposal was deferred for further study. **Vera Rich**