

prising a personal letter to his son, at present studying in the United States, an unidentified leaflet and an anonymous "Code of conduct during this testing time" addressed to Polish academics. Dr Herczynski now faces trial before a summary court. **Vera Rich**

NATO civil research

More wanted

Applicants for NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) fellowships will have less chance of success this year than ever before. Applications have risen by 30 per cent, while the number of fellowships (about 800) remains constant. The NATO science committee will have to apply "new criteria" to make selections, a spokesman said last week. One possibility is that group applicants will be favoured over individuals.

NATO staff pinpoint four reasons for the increase in applications — financial difficulties among the 15 member countries, an increase in the number of papers now citing NATO as a supporting agency, a deliberate "willingness" on the part of NATO to expand the programme and a policy of greater visibility, including advertising in *Nature*.

The willingness to expand, however, is restricted to the NATO Science Committee, headed by Frenchman Professor Robert Chabbal (at present NATO's Assistant Secretary-General for Scientific and Environmental Affairs). The Civil Budget Committee, from which Chabbal draws his funds, is not so willing. To cope with the increase in applications for fellowships and for summer-school sponsorship, and for increased travel costs, the committee would have to increase its budget next year by 25–30 per cent in real terms, to \$23–24 million. In fact, it may be lucky to get 15 per cent extra, just enough to cover the depreciation of the Belgian franc.

Pressing his case, Chabbal claimed last week that the NATQ civil science programme (which completely avoids military research) is substantial and important. It accounts for half of all summer-school and training fellowships. Schools such as the Ettore Majorana at Erice, Sicily, and Les Houches in the Alps, get 60 per cent of their money from NATO, said Chabbal.

Meanwhile the committee will press ahead with new plans. It runs advisory panels which help to provide seed money for communications in new fields, largely by establishing "advanced workshops", and this year it will create two new panels: one on global transport mechanisms (in the atmosphere, ocean and mantle) and one on the selective activation of molecules (for example by laser). These panels would be expected to launch six workshops a year for a maximum of five years.

The committee is also experimenting with links between an industry in one

country and a university in another, in a programme dubbed the "double jump". Finance will be *à la carte* — only interested countries need support it. So far only two such fellowships have been organized, but many more are planned — Dr Mario di Lullo, organizer of the "double jump" programme, believes that it will not run into the protectionist difficulties that sometimes face the European Commission — that one nation's industry does not reveal its secrets to nationals of another. **Robert Walgate**

British biotechnology

Out of the blue

In an unusual move, the British University Grants Committee is earmarking part of its annual budget to develop a specific topic — biotechnology. The committee plans that £800,000 will be spent in each of the next three academic years on fostering biotechnology in a handful of universities. The committee had previously been reluctant to earmark grants, preferring that universities should spend their income as they wished, relying on the research councils to encourage centres in particular topics by means of research grants.

The scale of the recent budget cuts seems to have prompted a change of heart. The committee, worried that universities may pare all their activities rather than cut them selectively, clearly hopes that earmarked grants will make the future pattern of university research more pointed. The £800,000 set aside for biotechnology will be taken from the money reserved for restructuring the reduced university system which in the next academic year (1982–83) will be £50 million. Most of that sum is expected to be spent on payments to redundant academics, leaving uncertain the amount available for fostering priorities.

So far, three centres — at University College London, the University of Birmingham and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology — have been awarded annual grants of £100,000 each to develop biotechnology. Five other centres are expected to receive similar grants soon. The money will be paid as a separate item in each of the next three years, after which it will be incorporated in the recipients' recurrent grants.

The grants committee says that the recipients must decide for themselves how to spend their extra money. Nevertheless, it expects them to forge closer links with industry, chiefly by encouraging the process engineering side of biotechnology, to develop postgraduate rather than undergraduate courses and to appoint some permanent staff, thus fulfilling the recommendation of a Royal Society report which nearly two years ago called for twenty more university posts in

biotechnology.

The research councils welcome the new grants, seeing no conflict between the grants committee's assessment of priority and their own. The Science and Engineering Research Council, in particular, welcomes the grants as a way of supporting staff and equipment which could not be paid for out of its research awards.

Judy Redfearn

Development and drugs

More not less

The latest shot in the long-running battle between the pharmaceuticals industry and its detractors, in which the health problems of developing countries provide the battleground, has been fired by the Office of Health Economics (OHE). Despite its governmental sounding title and Whitehall address, the office is sponsored by the UK pharmaceuticals industry and its main task is to carry out research on the economic aspects of medical care. Its latest contribution, *Medicines, Health and the Poor World* by David Taylor, is a response to recent criticisms of the industry's marketing practices.

The large multinational companies have been accused of over-aggressively selling unsuitable drugs in the developing countries, leading to only a minimal improvement in the health of the population and sometimes proving positively harmful. Chief among the industry's critics have been aid organizations such as Oxfam and War on Want and the pressure group Social Audit.

The report acknowledges that some drugs have been "inappropriately" sold in the past but claims that the industry itself is now more capable of policing its methods of promotion and that the important role of drugs in improving health care in developing nations may be obscured by concentration on abuse in some areas.

Although a typical poor nation may spend around a quarter of its central government health budget on pharmaceuticals, the report says, 60–70 per cent of the people do not have regular access even to the most basic drugs. So while it is important that those drugs now being sold to the "wealthier" members of developing societies are properly advertised and correctly used, it is even more important to find ways of getting the basic drugs to the mass of the population deprived of them. Whether the past performance of the multinational companies has contributed to the weaknesses of governmental health services in the developing countries, or whether the unavoidable difficulties have limited the ability of the drug companies to act effectively, remains a point of conflict.

Better distribution of a limited range of medicines and vaccines, together with research aimed specifically at new pharmaceuticals for the developing world, are the urgent needs, says OHE. The World