Petroleum congress

London gathering optimistic

THE Eleventh World Petroleum Congress, which took place in London last week, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the first such meeting, also in London. This round date inevitably gave a certain historical perspective to an otherwise routine forum for the exchange of technical expertise. The mood, however, was forward rather than backward looking, although the Polish delegation took the opportunity to host a slightly belated commemoration of the centenary, last year, of the death of Ignacy Lukasiewicz, whose invention in 1853 of the kerosene lamp effectively launched the modern petrochemical industry. Where more modern history impinged on the congress, the results were less happy — the Argentinian delegation arrived without its technical handouts, which had apparently been impounded by the British customs authorities.

The general theme of the congress, petroleum in the twenty-first century, both reflected the "historic" aspect of the meeting and proved sufficiently broad to cover all practical aspects of the industry

from prospecting to refinery techniques and from hydrocarbon chemistry to rig safety. Although no definitive answer emerged to the vital question of just how large are the world's remaining petroleum reserves, a general consensus emerged that, as far as oil and gas are concerned, the situation is "more optimistic than pessimistic". Since, however, new oilfields can be expected in more and more remote and difficult areas, there will be increasing scope for international cooperation and the pooling of expertise. In some cases, such as the recent proposals for joint Norwegian-Soviet exploration of the Barents Sea, there could be difficulties over lines of demarcation, but so far the atmosphere remains amicable, and the congress heard many accounts of effective and mutually beneficial joint training schemes and transfers of know-how, such as the joint British-Chinese project, which involved on the one hand the training of Chinese technicians aboard North Sea rigs, and on the other a considerable British involvement in the exploration of the South

China Sea.

Cautious optimism about world petroleum reserves does not, however, lessen the importance of energy conservation and more efficient recovery and processing methods. Topics discussed at the congress included new methods of obtaining hydrogen from residues, *in situ* combustion, the recovery of hydrocarbons from oil shales and the liquefaction and gasification of coal.

The formal programme had, however, little to offer in answer to the Prince of Wales, who, in opening the congress suggested that oil entrepreneurs with "imagination and far-sightedness" would doubtless set aside funds to develop new forms of energy to replace oil in the next century. Nevertheless, at least one oil producer is about to diversify — a special number of the Yugoslav petroleum journal *Nafta* published for the conference reported that the Croatian petroleum production association INA is about to start pilot-plant production of uranium yellow cake from phosphoric acid.

Vera Rich

UK postgraduates

SERC cracks the whip

POSTGRADUATE students in British universities are taking too long to complete their PhD theses, according to a survey by the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC). The survey asked the 59 universities and colleges in Britain how many of the students who began their PhD courses in 1978 had finished them within 4 years — by October last year. The table shows the results. Some students who are not still

registered after 4 years had left without presenting a thesis, hence the "missing" students in the table. SERC maintains that "writing up results within a reasonable timescale is an integral and important part of research training", and the council has circulated a booklet entitled *Research Student and Supervisor: a discussion document on good supervisory practice* in an attempt to improve matters. □

PhD submission by institution

Universities	No. of students registered	No. submitting by 1.10.82	No. still registered at 1.10.82 (%)	Universities	No. of students registered	No. submitting by 1.10.82	No. still registered at 1.10.82 (%)
Aston	62	26	21 (34)	Manchester	94	59	29 (31)
Bath	40	19	9 (23)	UMIST	55	20	9 (16)
Birmingham	67	42	18 (27)	Newcastle	56	24	30 (54)
Bradford	65	36	27 (42)	Nottingham	72	46	22 (31)
Bristol	65	36	27 (42)	Open	8	0	5 (63)
Brunel	15	7	7 (47)	Oxford	132	89	30 (23)
Cambridge	140	98	32 (23)	Reading	33	11	16 (48)
City	14	5	2 (14)	Salford	41	19	17 (42)
Cranfield Inst. of Tech.	10	3	4 (40)	Sheffield	69	32	31 (45)
Durham	20	10	9 (45)	Southampton	62	23	30 (48)
East Anglia	29	11	16 (55)	Surrey	32	19	11 (34)
Essex	18	4	9 (50)	Sussex	46	21	20 (43)
Exeter	22	10	12 (55)	Warwick	36	16	13 (36)
Hull	19	10	8 (42)	York	28	13	14 (50)
Keele	8	6	0 —	University of Wales:			
Kent	25	5	14 (56)	Aberystwyth	18	12	5 (28)
Lancaster	23	12	5 (22)	Bangor	24	8	8 (33)
Leeds	95	40	44 (46)	Cardiff	37	15	15 (41)
Leicester	38	19	12 (32)	Swansea	28	6	22 (79)
Liverpool	68	35	29 (43)	UWIST	10	4	4 (40)
London:				Aberdeen	21	11	7 (33)
Bedford	9	3	4 (44)	Dundee	13	9	3 (23)
Birkbeck	12	4	8 (67)	Edinburgh	44	20	21 (48)
Chelsea	16	7	8 (50)	Glasgow	45	22	12 (27)
Imperial	137	67	48 (35)	Heriot-Watt	24	10	11 (46)
Kings	24	14	6 (25)	St Andrews	21	16	4 (19)
Queen Elizabeth	21	3	16 (76)	Stirling	7	4	1 (14)
Queen Mary	37	11	25 (68)	Strathclyde	40	22	14 (35)
Royal Holloway	13	2	8 (62)	Queens Belfast	1	1	0 (—)
University	52	23	23 (50)	Total universities	2,297	1,124	868 (38)
Westfield	9	4	5 (56)	Total polytechnics	100	35	51 (51)
Other institutions	33	14	13 (39)	Other institutions	8	1	4 (50)
Loughborough	25	8	14 (56)	Total	2,405	1,160	923 (38)

Cleaner Thames

THE Thames Water Authority last week jubilantly announced that for the first time in 150 years a salmon had been caught in London's river. The authority began restocking the Thames with salmon in 1979 with the aim of seeing whether the river had been sufficiently freed of pollution to satisfy even the fastidious salmon. For catching the fish, Mr Russell Doig was rewarded with a prize of £250. What the salmon thought of today's River Thames is open to speculation, but the fish may not have been that impressed, as in Mr Doig's words "For a salmon it didn't put up much of a fight". □