

identified by many others than Mr Gorbachev. So how, in the brave new Soviet Union, will people be guided to those activities best suited to the interests of the greater good when their inclinations might take them elsewhere? Mr Gorbachev's answer last week was that democracy at the workplace (and in the academy institutes) may do the trick. Many of those who have read what he had to say with enthusiasm will no doubt give him the benefit of such doubts as they may have. Everything will depend on whether he and his managers of research can deliver the promise before it is forgotten, or overwhelmed by cynicism. □

Star Wars for arms ^{John Maadby}

This week's resumption of arms control negotiations should be interesting, even productive.

CURIOUS things are happening about arms control. Both the United States and the Soviet Union appear to be eager to negotiate with each other, as if they were back together at Reykjavik in the early northern winter, while being as far apart as they were then found to be on what they are negotiating about. It is as if the medium has taken control of the message, the process of the product. The reason, of course, is that neither of the superpowers dares face the risk of giving lasting offence to the constituencies for a more rational way of conducting international affairs, while neither feels able to compromise what it considers to be crucial interests. So the Soviet Union is busily dismantling the phased-array radar at Krasnoyarsk, in Siberia, for fear of being held in violation of the 1972 treaty on Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) while the United States appears to have encouraged its negotiators to talk about the conditions under which ABM would be applicable to the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) against the wishes of the Pentagon. It is not unusual that the two governments should be talking to each other without quite knowing why, but there may be profit for the rest of us in the circumstances.

SDI remains the stumbling-block, as it is bound to be. Nearly four years have passed since the concept of a shield against other people's attacks was put forward in the United States; it is natural that the passage of time should wear away at everybody's peace of mind. The effect is most noticeable in the United States, where the Department of Defense and its supporters have been wondering aloud, as if in a private soliloquy, whether to deploy some elements of this shield against hostile missiles long before the due date, sometime towards the end of the century. The objective is to ensure that there is something tangible in place before the end of the present administration, so that its successors will feel impelled along the track of their predecessor by the weight of money spent. But it may be a late even for that.

The plain truth is that the United States can serve no useful purpose by talking about the early deployment of SDI unless it plans to withdraw the undertaking given to the British prime minister three years ago that there would be no deployment without consultation with the other side, presumed to be the Soviet Union. The undertaking has been an important part of the cement that has held Western Europe together with itself in the past four years, and surprisingly tolerant of United States policy on other matters at the same time. The trouble is that the talk of installing something under the umbrella of SDI sooner rather than later, even if it might have been installed ten years ago, is bound to seem a violation of that undertaking. Whatever the technical *lacunae* of the interceptor phases of SDI may be, that fact remains that the United States cannot seriously pretend to deploy elements of SDI without losing friends in Western Europe.

Confusion arises because the Soviet Union knows this as well as the United States, yet appears willing to open the bargaining in this round at Geneva without acknowledging as much. One explanation of this week's events is that the Soviet Union is

willing to talk out the two years ahead in the hope of having a more constructive conversation with the next president; the error in that calculation is that the next president of whatever stripe will need time to become acclimatized to his environment. Another is that the Soviet Union has decided that, with no prospect of another agreement on arms control, it will serve somebody's purpose that there should be a clear understanding of what ABM really means. Yet another is that the talk is merely talk for the sake of talking, to avoid the contumely of being seen to give up.

But this is wide of everybody's mark. What people want, just now, is a simple agreement that both sides will reduce the potency of their strategic forces by some verifiable amount, by a number of warheads appropriately weighted or by a proportion not dissimilar to a half. There is no lack of frameworks of agreement, nor any danger for either side that one agreement would become a bar to others. With such modest objectives, many agreements nearly reached in recent years would suffice. Salt II, never ratified, was technically violated last year (by the United States), when an extra bomber was commissioned, yet is still within one per cent of balance. Why not the same at half the level? Is that too much to ask for as a temporary solution for a continuing problem? □

Changing British sports ^{John Maadby}

British universities seem to have learned one transatlantic lesson — professional athleticism.

It is a long time since the British shared the belief that others have of them, that their favourite sports are fox-hunting, horse-racing, cricket and rowing, in that order. (To judge by times allocated in broadcasting schedules, the most popular game is now snooker, played with a number of differently coloured balls on a billiards table.) It is also, as others well know, some time since the British had a university system that could rub shoulders on equal terms with university systems elsewhere still prolific of scholarship of the highest quality. The British themselves may not yet accept the second of these propositions, which may help to explain why the University of Oxford has for several weeks been preoccupied by the contentious question of which eight students should represent it in next month's boat race against the University of Cambridge, traditionally held on the neutral water filling a four-mile stretch of the tidal Thames in west London. Why else should a university whose survival is threatened by lack of funds indulge the luxury of brooding on such a trivial matter?

The issue has many ramifications, not least of which appears to be Anglo-American tension of a familiar kind. The circumstances are that, after a long winning streak, Oxford lost last year's boat race and promptly set about ensuring that the same would not happen again by recruiting from the United States a number of stalwart rowing men as graduate students, some reading for diplomas in social science (one of Oxford's softer options) who had already shown their promise as oarsmen, often by winning prizes in competitions for the US universities at which they had been undergraduates. Trouble seems to have arisen when one of these stalwarts, a veteran of last year's crew, was excluded from this year's boat. For the best part of two weeks, the Oxford crew has declined to practise, putting at risk even its loaded chance of success. The quarrel was patched up only at the weekend, with the recalcitrants returning to the fold. Now, whatever the outcome of next month's race, it is clear that Oxford has in some sense lost. The race rules are that rowers must be students, but it has not previously been found necessary to define what being a student means. Now Cambridge will be within its rights to demand some kind of definition. People elsewhere may reflect that, in the decline of great universities, external pressure not merely drives away the good but brings out the worst in those who are left. □