

even who are psychiatrically sick. HIV was added to the list only in 1987, on the basis of an amendment by Senator Jesse Helms.

The policy is not new. One of the memorable sights of the Western world is that of would-be permanent immigrants presenting to US immigration officers the X-ray films that show them to be free from tuberculosis, but even temporary visitors have to declare themselves free of that and other infections, AIDS included. It is ironical that some of those most concerned to learn at first hand where AIDS research stands now may be excluded from the conference in June. The International Aids Society, based in Frankfurt, is but the latest interested party to protest.

The issue is important, but should not be mistaken for a simple violation of the principles of academic freedom. International conferences at which attendance is forbidden to some on the grounds of race, nationality or politics do not deserve the name, or the support of serious academic societies. But the restriction that may affect those wishing to go to San Francisco in June is not in that sense discriminatory. Nor is there reason to suspect that the US immigration authorities will exercise in a discriminatory fashion the powers they enjoy, whose only rationale can be that the US population should be protected from unwanted infection. In any case, while the law as it stands is the law, there are also procedures by which those affected can get waivers, or otherwise be exempted from the restraints. The US Immigration Service says that it will be sympathetic to those who apply for waivers and exemptions. The time to complain will be when there is some evidence that it is responding otherwise.

It is more relevant that the annual AIDS conferences are in danger of getting out of hand. Last year in Montreal, as at the previous conference in Washington, the proceedings had an element of the circus. There are too many parallel sessions at which too many people have too much to say, and there are also sideshows, often provided by AIDS pressure groups, that have insistently raised the question whether there are not better ways than these of exchanging information on AIDS research. After Montreal, many serious researchers muttered that they would not return. The sponsors, notably the US National Institutes of Health, might usefully use the next few months to decide whether perpetuation is necessary. Serious people will not think they are turning their backs on AIDS if they decide to abandon the annual conference.

Meanwhile, there is the matter of visas for this year to settle. Fears that a few scores or even hundreds of people carrying HIV and visiting for a week or so would be a serious threat to the well-being of the United States are insubstantial. It would be different if there were thousands, and if they planned to stay for months. In short, there is no serious hazard in letting registered participants at the conference have visas, whatever their state of health. It would be a shame if the United States should spoil its excellent record on free access for the sake of a little bumbledom. □

## Japan bashing pauses

Japan and the United States need a better mechanism for mutual stability than a stop-over at Los Angeles.

THE meeting of the finance ministers of the United States and Japan at Los Angeles last week-end seems to have done nothing to improve relations between the two most dynamic economies in the world. And even the earlier announcement that a deal has at last been struck on the export of US supercomputers to Japan will not blunt the edge of the continuing dispute (see page 370); the benefits to the United States and to Cray Research Inc. will not be as great as they have been made to seem. Yet neither the US Secretary of the Treasury, Mr Nicholas Brady, nor his opposite number, Mr Ryotaro Hashimoto, can relish the prospect of continuing backbiting. What is to be done?

The new development is the sudden collapse of the Tokyo stockmarket and the weakening of the yen, which has fallen in value against the US dollar by 7.5 per cent this month. Both developments probably have the same cause — the calculation by people outside Japan that their money would better earn its keep in the United States, where interest rates are higher and dividends more generous. But the trigger for the transformation has been the remarkable flight of money to West Germany, on the calculation that the prospect of reunification creates new profitable opportunities for investment. Japan is having to learn the hard way that the world in which it earns its good living is truly international.

There is nothing very remarkable about that. What is more surprising is that the United States appears to be indifferent to the dangers inherent in the developing situation. If the yen continues to fall (or even stays where it is), Japanese exporters will have their salesmen scouring the United States for orders in a trice, and the US trade deficit with Japan will worsen again. If, on the other hand, Japanese interest rates are increased so as to make investment in the yen more profitable, fewer Japanese will invest in US Treasury bonds and the difficulty of financing the US federal deficit will be increased.

In smaller, but locally no less painful, ways, the same troubles crop up elsewhere. In Britain, for example, even 15 per cent interest rates have not stemmed the decline of sterling, and may have to be increased further. Britain, fortunately, has a remedy which it has so far declined to adopt — membership of the currency stabilization mechanism of the European Monetary System; the British government is now talking up this idea more sympathetically than for the past year. What Japan and the United States now need is a club of the same kind to which they might belong, preferably one linked with the European system. What Mr Hasimoto was asking for at the week-end was the beginnings of such an arrangement. It is a great pity that he has been denied for not much better a reason than that Japan is due for — even in some sense deserves — a bout of misfortune. □