Chester Beatty seeks Cure for Middle-aged Spread

from our Special Correspondent

THESE are troubled times for the Chester Beatty Research Institute. The recent two-day inquisition by a visiting subcommittee of the Medical Research Council, and the muted allegations of heresy that emerged from it, are the least of the institute's problems. The Chester Beatty is facing organizational strains that have been building up for several years. It lacks the funds to hire new blood and the resolve to purge the old. It has lost the full confidence of its two rich friends, the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the British Empire Cancer Campaign for Research (BECCR). And, to prove that misfortunes never come singly, it is fighting its battles without the aid of a director. Since the retirement of Sir Alexander Hadow in March, the institute has been governed by a committee.

What has gone wrong? In its own opinion—and indeed that of others—the Chester Beatty is the most important cancer research institute in Britain and it has the finest output. But the high powered subcommittee seems to have been unhappy at what it saw. The subcommittee included Dr J. A. B. Gray, the secretary of the MRC, and Professor T. Crawford, chairman of the scientific advisory committee of the BECCR. (These two organizations contribute £500,000 and £250,000 respectively to the £1,200,000 annual budget of the Institute of Cancer Research, of which the Chester Beatty is the major part.) Also on the MRC subcommittee were Professor J. L. Gowans (Oxford), Professor T. Symington (Glasgow), Professor K. Burton (Newcastle upon Tyne) and Professor P. M. B. Walker (Edinburgh). The subcommittee's report has not yet been published, but Mr N. P. Hadow, the secretary of the Institute of Cancer Research, says that "at least 50 per cent of the report is highly complimentary".

It seems, however, that the report is not overladen with compliments. Very few research projects at the institute receive unequivocal praise, whilst others are criticized, some of them possibly unjustifiably because, as the subcommittee admits, it could spare little more than 15 minutes on each interview in the course of its two day sittings. The report has few words of comfort for the immunologists at the institute and has come down against the screening of chemical compounds, although little work of this kind is done there.

The subcommittee has also complained about the organization at the institute, unfairly perhaps, because the best organized research groups there are often the dullest. Moreover, the price of strengthening communications within the institute would not necessarily be worth the rewards.

What will be the results of the subcommittee's visits? It is unlikely that any staff changes will be made on the basis of the report alone, which is often too imprecise or ambiguous to support such decisions. What seems certain is that the MRC has already decided in its own mind to alter the basis of its support for the institute. The present five year grant is a cheque for £500,000 a year. To gain more control over the research carried out at the institute, the MRC

wishes to replace half of the block grant with grants tied to individual projects. These, as is the MRC's practice, would run for limited periods of three years or so at the end of which they would be subject to renewal. Assuming that the bulk grant is reduced to £250,000 the project grants are unlikely to total less than £250,000 also, for the MRC has said that it "has no intention of reducing support in future".

Although members of the institute do not go all the way with the subcommittee's report, it is well recognized that the present arrangements are unsatisfactory. The great debate is just beginning on how best to put its house in order. The organizational problems go back not to recent years but to the time when the institute started. As the heritage of a bad structure, or lack of structure, it has proved hard to initiate the right kind of discussions and coordinate research to the best advantage. At present, the wrong people are at the top and the good people have too little say in how the institute should be run. There is, too, a heritage of dead wood which is the result of an overgenerous distribution of permanent appointments in the 1950s and early 1960s. In supporting this middle-aged spread, the institute has left itself too little slack elsewhere. It is not being able to tackle new lines of research because it cannot afford to make new appointments and buy in new blood. Nor does it have steady throughput of staff that should characterize an intellectually vigorous institute.

In the past the organizational ambivalence from which the institute has suffered, the pull between the desire for academic independence on the one hand and the needs of a mission-based institute on the other, has been exacerbated by the uneasy relations with the Medical Research Council. The previous secretary, Sir Harold Himsworth, did not welcome the costly responsibility of supporting the institute and was firmly resolved to hand it over to the University of London. The university was as unwilling to accept the gift as the gift was to be accepted, and Sir Harold's successor, Dr Gray, agreed to continue the MRC's sponsorship.

The middle-aged spread, the dissipation of research effort and the problems of grouping all the scientific staff under first-class heads of departments, are felt to have eroded the confidence of the institute's chief sponsoring bodies, the MRC and the BECCR. It is thought that the BECCR could afford to give more to the institute if its confidence were to be restored and the MRC might be prevailed on to do likewise. Although there is no immediate financial crisis, the incoming legacies are being used up instead of invested and the lack of funds to hire new staff is acute. Professor Crawford, however, has pointed out that the BECCR already gives £250,000 to the institute, which is a quarter of its annual income; the BECCR would be rightly criticized if it invested more than this in any one institution. The MRC has also denied any intention of reducing grants in future.

The institute is now reaping the harvest of the way its system of appointments and administrative structure has developed in past years. It has driven itself

into a corner where, because of its lack of flexibility, it cannot get more money without developing new lines of research and cannot develop new lines of research without more money. Its greatest need at the moment is for a new director. The job specification calls for a scientist distinguished in his own field who will have

the authority to reorganize both the Chester Beatty and the three smaller departments attached to the Institute of Cancer Research. It may be that no scientist of worth will wish to take on an institute which finds itself in such a dilemma. But the challenge would be worth while. Applicants should not delay.

Cheerful Pugwash at Sochi

THE nineteenth Pugwash conference at Sochi on the Black Sea from October 22 to 27 seems to have been a successful occasion. Participants included more than 100 scientists from twenty-nine countries. Although much of the work of the conference lay in familiar Pugwash territory, it appears that the discussions were more than usually cordial. Nobody knows to what extent this may have arisen because the nineteenth conference was the first which has been open to journalists.

A statement issued by the Continuing Committee of Pugwash after the conference deals with a number of familiar topics but also with the problem of Vietnam. It appears that the working group with this problem on its agenda decided that "the complete withdrawal, as quickly as possible, of American troops from South Vietnam is a necessary condition for the establishment of peace in that country". It went on to urge a rapid reduction of the concentration of American troops in South Vietnam and, by doing so, abandoned at least some of the old Pugwash caution which has kept the organization from too direct an involvement with strictly political matters. In Nigeria, Pugwash wants a cease-fire. Although some participants at the conference emerged from the discussion on the Middle East saying "we have fought the Six Day War all over again", in the event the Pugwash statement is for the UN resolution of November 22, 1967, and for a reduction of tension in the Middle East.

In Europe, Pugwash wants to see a "system for European security and the dissolution of the military blocs". Acknowledging, however, that this is a long term objective, the statement goes on to say that it would like to see short term agreements for the abandonment of the use of force and a reduction of military forces in Europe. In this spirit, the working group dealing with European problems lent its support to the notion of a European security conference, hoping that it would lead to the formation of a permanent body under the aegis of the United Nations. There seems to have been some disagreement about the extent to which the United States and Canada should be involved in these discussions—a symbol, no doubt, for the political obstacles that would have to be overcome before problems of European security could be considered in isolation. The Sochi Pugwash went on record by asking for a recognition of existing European boundaries, the German Democratic Republic in particular, but had a number of constructive suggestions to make about the greater interchange between East and West in Europe. On Czechoslovakia, however, the Continuing Committee has nothing to say except that there were "conflicting views"—evidently Czecho-

slovakia will cast a shadow over Pugwash for many years to come.

The strongest part of the committee's report is that dealing with nuclear weapons and delivery systems—the problems now to be taken up by the Conference on Strategic Arms Limitations between the United States and the Soviet Union at Helsinki. Pugwash says that the development of antiballistic missiles and multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles is bound to give another twist to the arms race. Moreover, it says, deployment would upset the calculations on which present strategies are based, with the result that forces would probably be increased in number. This is why the group at Sochi gave an unqualified cheer for the announcement that the SALT talks are due to begin on November 17. There is also some general exhortation in the report on the importance of persuading black sheep to sign both the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Partial Test-Ban Treaty.

The working group concerned with strategic arms limitation seems to have considered ways in which the development of ABMs and NIRVs could be stopped, possibly by tacit agreement, by simultaneous unilateral declarations or even by voluntary self-denial in the hope of reciprocal action. To begin with, a moratorium on the testing of both kinds of weapons was held out as a necessary step if comprehensive agreements are eventually to be negotiated.

The statement from the group concerned with arms limitations goes on to say that a substantial reduction in the existing level of armaments would be compatible with effective deterrence. As a part of the package, it considered that more effective means of controlling the production of fissile material ought to be developed within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It considered that the proposed seabed treaty would be useful if only as a first step. The notion that the partial test-ban should be made comprehensive seems to have been to some members a realistic goal in itself and to others to be a measure to be combined with the SALT talks.

The discussion at Sochi on chemical and biological weapons gave a blessing to the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which prohibits the first use of chemical and biological weapons, but asked that further steps should be taken urgently. One of the problems exercising the group was the degree to which chemical agents could be legitimately used in peacetime and it seems to have agreed that the need for a watertight definition is urgent. At the same time, it wishes to ban the development, production and stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons as well as to encourage research on rapid detection and identification.