

that the environmental impact statement prepared by the Department of Agriculture is ridiculous, since it offers no evaluation of the carcinogenicity of Mirex or of its effects on predator avian enzyme systems and egg shells. Serious reservations about the Mirex programme are apparent in the comments of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the Environmental Protection Agency, to which the USDA impact statement was submitted. But on the basis of 8 years' experience with Mirex, during which no non-target organism except for related species of oil-loving ants have suffered proven harm, the Department of Agriculture is confident that use of Mirex at the proposed dosage will result in no excessive or irretrievable impact on the environment.

#### ACCELERATORS

### Sacking the SLAC Way

from a Correspondent

AT a time when the budgets of most physical institutions are declining, at least in real terms, the response of many directors is to reduce their payroll *pro rata*. Job prospects for those dismissed as a result of budget cuts are not always too bright. A notable exception from this law of the jungle is the budgetary and personnel policy being pursued at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC). There the criterion for making budget cuts is to minimize dismissals.

Under the Atomic Energy Commission budget proposed by President Nixon for the coming financial year, the activity at SLAC will have to be reduced by some 10 per cent. The director, Wolfgang K. H. Panofsky, told a recent meeting of the 1,200 laboratory staff that the reduction implied SLAC would have to decrease its in-house effort by the equivalent of 100 man years. But instead of removing that number of people from the payroll, Panofsky proposed programmes which entail the deferral of salary increases for higher paid members of staff, a series of shortened work-weeks and a policy of leaving vacancies unfilled as far as possible. As a result, Panofsky hopes to keep down the number of involuntary dismissals to between 20 and 40.

Panofsky's salary deferral plan will mean that the higher-paid staff members, approximately 40 per cent of the staff, will have their salary increases postponed by between three and six months. The short work-week part of the programme will attempt to develop long but unpaid week-ends for employees so that the laboratory can minimize its operational costs during that period.

SLAC also plans to reduce outside

purchases of goods and services. In addition, the accelerator will be operated at about 5 per cent less than its present activity, even though this seems to be a considerable under-use of such a capital intensive instrument. Approxi-

mately 308 hour shifts of beam operation will be cancelled next year. Previous budget cuts had already reduced the number of shifts from a peak of nearly 700 in 1969 to about 550 a year.

## Short Notes

### Ecological Eclogue

A POEM on an ecological theme has been composed by presidential hopeful Senator Edmund S. Muskie. Published last week in the *New York Times*, the poem delicately evokes by its broken syntax and irregular stress the savage insults wreaked on man and his environment by industrial wastes, as in the aposiopetic lines,

Not now—we don't need  
Environmental black lung, we  
Need to look again, find new ways  
Stop!

The following two verses (given in prose—the form of the verse is evident) illustrate the depth of the poet's concern with problems likely to become an issue in the 1972 elections, together with his prescription for solving them: "To feed the hungry, house the poor, educate the young and care for the ill but don't foul our biosphere. We can—we have the knowledge, the skill, and the treasure—only our dedication—commitment—is in doubt."

Litterateurs in Washington have been nearly unstinting in their praise for the senator's incursion into the arena of Congressional versification hitherto dominated by the former Senator Eugene J. McCarthy. "He has the genius of William McGonagall though without the rhyme" was the verdict of one critic last week. "Senator Muskie's verse may not be as good as the poems of Mao Tse-Tung", said another, "but it is surely superior to the paintings of Hitler or Sir Winston Churchill".

### Communication with China

THE sudden breaching of Chinese isolation by the visit of the American ping-pong players last week has caught the National Academy of Sciences unawares. The chairman of its Committee on Scholarly Communication with Mainland China, Dr John M. H. Lindbeck of Columbia University, died in January and a successor has not yet been appointed. The committee was established in 1966 in face of the substantial barriers to communication raised by the events of the cultural revolution. But the committee's efforts to commune with *Academia Sinica*, the Chinese counterpart of the National Academy of Sciences, have been unreciprocated. "We are now in the process of trying to reassure *Academia Sinica* that this is a non-governmental enterprise and that we are ready to

start discussions if they are", staff members of the Academy said last week. "The ping pong ball has been in their court for some while."

### NSF Picks Up after AEC

REDUCTION in the Atomic Energy Commission's 1972 budget for physical research will lead to the abandonment of some 140 projects worth a total of about \$10 million. By arrangement with the AEC, the National Science Foundation is informing the scientists in charge of the discarded projects how to solicit the NSF for grants to continue their work. Proposals from abandoned AEC scientists will have to compete on merit with other proposals submitted to the NSF. For this reason it is not known what proportion of the AEC projects will eventually be saved from the scrap heap.

### More Trouble for the AEC

THE Atomic Energy Commission last week announced plans to conduct an underground nuclear test of nearly 5 megatons at Amchitka Island in the Aleutians. The test, projected for the autumn, seems likely to bring the AEC into conflict with the environmental lobby, Japan, Canada, Senator Gravel of Alaska, Senator Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and opponents of the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system, to name but a few. The test, code-named Cannikin, is said to be for the warhead of a Spartan missile. Senator Humphrey has already called for cancellation of Cannikin, saying such tests are inappropriate during the SALT talks.

Another class of critics are environmentalists and those who fear the explosion will trigger off earthquakes and attendant tsunamis in the region. The Amchitka test site, established by the AEC in 1965 when nobody cared much about these matters, is situated over an active seismic zone. The risks of triggering a major earthquake in the region by a nuclear explosion must be impossible to calculate with certainty; almost the best that can be said is that Milrow, a 1.2 megaton test exploded in 1969, did not cause an earthquake. What Milrow did cause were protests from Canada and Japan and four days of hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Cannikin seems certain to be even more troublesome for the AEC.