report shows that the amount of mercury found in canned tuna in Britain is similar to that found in the United States and of the varieties of foods tested tuna contained most mercury—an average of 0.18 mg kg^{-1} compared with canned salmon that was found to contain between 0.01 and 0.04 mg kg^{-1} of mercury. No detectable mercury was found in flour, cheese, beef, chicken meat, eggs, bacon, ham, rice, sugar, and breakfast cereals while small but detectable amounts were found in cabbage, potatoes, apples, carrots and imported tomatoes (all less than 0.004 mg kg^{-1}).

FRENCH SCIENCE

Budget Plans

from *La Recherche*

WITHIN the next few weeks the French Parliament will be approving the country's research budget for the coming year. This action is significant because 1972 will be the first year of the sixth five-year plan, and will thus be evidence of the long-term intentions towards research.

There has been nothing innovative so far in the method of determining the French research budget, although the *enveloppe-recherche*, or grouped project approach, has been refined. This idea is that most of the sums voted for civil research and development underwritten by various ministries are examined in advance each spring by an interdepartmental group. Thus, the money to be spent on the *enveloppe recherche* in 1972 is in close agreement with the overall *enveloppe* approved for the comprehensive 1971–5 plan.

The total vote for 1972 is 3,848 million francs (almost £287 million) in research programme authorizations. This represents an increase of 15.5 per cent on the year. If this increase appears to be unusual, it is nonetheless quite in line with the minimal projections set forth in the plan. The breakdown of the budget conforms, of course, with the major options set forth in the plan so that, for example, the 54 per cent increase awarded to the Health Ministry and the 46 per cent increase for agriculture reflect the priority being given to research and development in the life sciences. The sums voted for work on pollution and the environment under the aegis of the new Ministry of the Environment increase from 4.2 to 13 million francs (£1 million). The vote for aid to industrial research will also jump sharply while the earmarked appropriations for industry—*l'aide au développement*—are being augmented by an impressive 35 per cent.

Among the research organizations responsible to the Ministry of Industrial and Scientific Research, only the oceanological CNEXO centre will enjoy

an increase in its vote (25 per cent). The 1972 sums confirm a levelling out of expenditure at the Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique and a marked braking of the momentum of space research. The space agency, CNES, will be voted a modest increase of 2.3 per cent (581.5 to 595 million francs). There could be a supplementary vote for CNES if the European launcher becomes a reality, but the future of the French space agency is increasingly in doubt.

Operating expenses for research organizations will be raised by about 15 per cent, but there will not be a commensurate increase in the research establishment. In 1971 there were 432 new jobs created throughout the ministries; there will be 280 next year. At the National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS) there will be 130 new jobs, whereas this year there have been 250. This lack of new blood in the year to come is a difficult problem in France's current scientific research effort.

The situation concerning basic research remains precarious. The 15 per cent increase of operating expenses at CNRS will be devoted largely to adjust compensation in the career development process and to give deserved merit increases to the staff. Elsewhere, the modest sums voted (an 8 per cent increase) for research at the level of higher education is a reversion to past practice. University laboratories face a difficult situation because they depend on the sums voted them directly and in many cases they do not themselves receive support from the CNRS.

So will next year's financing of research amount to nothing more than catching up, to compensate for other, leaner years in French research? In certain research areas, there will definitely be marking of time for another year. Perhaps M. Ortoli, the Minister of Industrial and Scientific Research, will be able in the days ahead to resolve some of the uncertainties undermining French research policy today.

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION

Still Alive

THE Architectural Association's School is now "active and healthy and well" in spite of the traumas of the past eighteen months, according to Professor Alvin Boyarsky, the newly appointed chairman of the school and its academic board.

The recent history of the school has been far from healthy. In February last year, plans for a merger with Imperial College, precipitated by the school's financial difficulties, fell through after six years of negotiation (see *Nature*, 225, 575; 1971). Other proposed mergers went the same way and the

school was left with the old problems and a lease that expires in 1976 and is unlikely to be renewed on the present favourable terms. There were fears that the school would have to be run down and closed. In spite of the problems, however, the AA's members and students at the school were determined to keep the school open and approaches were made to the Department of Education and Science (DES) and to local education authorities (LEAs) resulting in a rise in the fees from £460 to £580 and a fresh intake of 57 students this October.

Along with the new lease of life has come a reorganization of the school's structure. The post of principal, previously held by Mr John Lloyd, has disappeared and Professor Boyarsky is now responsible to a nine-man forum elected by the students, staff, association council and the membership.

Professor Boyarsky, a former staff member, is enthusiastic about the school's potential. Having departed in 1965 before the troubles began in earnest, he is far more concerned about future plans than past battles. He confesses to being "stunned" by the amount of activity in the school, sees its problems merely as "a challenge", plans to expand the school's evening work to involve more outside people and hopes to enlarge the school's already considerable international role.

But if things are brighter than they were, the clouds are still on the horizon. The school's fees of £580, paid by local education authorities, are much higher than the £60 to £75 paid to send students to other colleges and universities. In real terms, however, the school claims that the total cost of sending a student to the school is half to two thirds of that of sending him elsewhere—unlike other institutions, the AA is independent of central government finance. Although the Department of Education and Science has agreed to the steep increase of fees, it is insisting that there must be a viable plan for the future before the 1972 intake will be supported. What Mr John Smith, president of the Architectural Association, wants to see is a partnership between school and state, but he also feels that "to maintain our purpose we think it is important that we remain independent". Professor Boyarsky says that the biggest problem is not in finding the lump sum to renew the lease or find new premises (an appeal is to be run during the next year to help raise the money for this) but in finding the money for day to day expenses. He points out that an annual grant of £250,000 would solve the AA's problems by bringing the fees for the 485 students down to the same level as for other colleges and "to keep this cloud over this vibrant situation for so long for