licensing medicines, and he emphasized that the industry must still regard the possible dangers of new drugs with the utmost concern.

But while products should continue to be manufactured with safety very much in mind, Mr Boden said, safety must not become too much of a threat to the progress of science. If this happens it will take much longer to pass on the benefits of research to society.

Those who are demanding that new drugs be absolutely safe before release to the public are pursuing a myth, according to Mr Boden. The cry of safety at all costs is impractical and the cost of research must not be raised to a level that no manufacturer can afford.

There are signs that pressure is being brought to bear to slow down the work of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, and it would be sad, said Mr Boden, if the British pharmaceutical companies had to look outside this committee for somewhere to carry out early clinical trials on drugs.

People must, of course, have a right to obtain adequate compensation for injury sustained from drugs, Mr Boden said, but the sum of nearly £1 million a day that is spent world wide in research by the pharmaceutical industry must be used to optimum advantage.

SPACE

Copernicus-500

THE joint Polish–Soviet solar physics research satellite, promised last February as part of the Copernicus quincentenary celebration, was launched on April 19 as part of the Interkosmos series. The satellite is designed to study "sporadic" solar radiation, in particular the radio emission from the Sun between 0.6 and 6.0 MHz and also to investigate the characteristics of the ionosphere. Its orbital parameters are: perigee 202 km, apogee 1,551 km, inclination 102.2°.

"Copernicus-500", as this special Interkosmos is called, carries low-frequency and high-frequency ionosphere probes of Soviet manufacture, and a radiospectrograph developed by a Polish team based in Toruń, the birthplace of Copernicus. This is the first time that this Polish instrument has been used in the Interkosmos programme, although similar radiospectrographs have been carried by the Comecon high-altitude geophysical probes.

Interviewed in *Pravda*, the head of the Polish side of the Copernicus project, Academician Dionizy Smolenski, spoke of the particular contributions which Poland hopes to make to the Comecon space projects. Four chief fields are involved: space physics (including space geodesy), meteorology, communications and space biology and medicine. In particular, Polish scientists are playing a considerable role in the *Dinamika* programme which comprises a number of experiments on the Earth's gravitational field, undertaking the coordination of theoretical and experimental work on the improvement of methods of observing and computing the trajectories of space objects for geodesic purposes.

Though "Copernicus-500" was announced as a joint Polish–Soviet experiment, the other Comecon countries are also participating. Czechoslovakia has provided a special onboard telemetry transmitter, and synchronized solar observations are being made from astrophysical and geophysical observatories throughout the Comecon block.

EDUCATION

Social Significance

from a Correspondent

AN association to further the social significance of the teaching of science and mathematics in the British Commonwealth has been set up as a result of a meeting of representatives of seventeen countries which was held at the University of the West Indies at Kingston, Jamaica, last month.

The acting chairman of the association (Commonwealth Association of Science and Mathematics Educators, CASME) is Mr Maurice Goldsmith, chairman of the Guinness awards, which organized the symposium.

One of the aims of the association is to ensure that the natural sciences, technology, mathematics and the social sciences are integrated in the training of teachers. This, however, requires that teachers must be trained in a different way. CASME will consider, among other topics, how this can best be done.

LUBRICATION

Contract for Swansea

THE Tribology Centre at the University College of Swansea has been awarded a contract by the European Space Research and Technology Centre to look into the use of molybdenum disulphide as a lubricant. Although the compound has been used in the United States' space programme, for example to lubricate the legs of the Apollo lunar modules, European designers have been reluctant to use it because there is a conflict in the literature about its suitability in space conditions.

Dr A. R. Lansdown, Director of the Tribology Centre said this week that although the contract is a preliminary one worth less than £10,000 he is hopeful that it will be followed by others.

NATURE CONSERVANCY

New Council Chairman

SIR David Serpell, former Permanent Secretary at the Department of the Environment, is to be the first chairman of the new Nature Conservancy Council which is due to come into existence shortly.

The new council, first outlined in last July's white paper on Government research and development, will take over part of the functions of the Nature Conservancy, and will be responsible for establishing, maintaining and managing nature reserves in Britain, and commissioning and supporting relevant research. The council will have a budget of about £1.4 million, £0.3 million of which will be spent on research. The remainder of the Nature Conservancy's work will remain within the Natural Environment Research Council, of which the conservancy is a part, and a new Institute of Terrestrial Ecology will be formed by the council.

Sir David Serpell

Sir David, 61, who retired in September last year, has been a civil servant for more than thirty years, working at various times for the Ministries of Food, Fuel and Power, and Transport, with spells at the Treasury and the Board of Trade. In 1970 when the Department of the Environment was formed, he became its first permanent secretary. A graduate of the University of Oxford, the University of Toulouse and Syracuse University in the United States, he is also a fellow of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in the USA.