

mends that the AEC should design a system of safeguards for each nuclear fuel cycle, based on the best technology available, and the agency should also consider the possibility of establishing a special federal security service whose sole job would be to protect nuclear material at fixed sites and during transit. Willrich and Taylor also suggested that careful consideration should be given to locating fuel reprocessing and fabrication plants side by side, to cut down the transportation of nuclear fuels between facilities. Finally, they suggest that the United States government should initiate discussions with other countries which have substantial nuclear power programmes in an effort

to develop a common policy towards international safeguards against nuclear theft anywhere in the world. The AEC's reaction is that its safeguards are more effective than Willrich and Taylor suggest.

But the credibility of the agency's safeguards received a severe blow last year when the General Accounting Office (GAO), a watchdog agency of the United States Congress, published the results of an inspection of three plants which handle strategically significant quantities of fissionable material. The GAO found evidence of laxity such as gaping holes in perimeter fences, inadequate burglar alarms and vulnerable storage facilities.

OECD probing in Australia

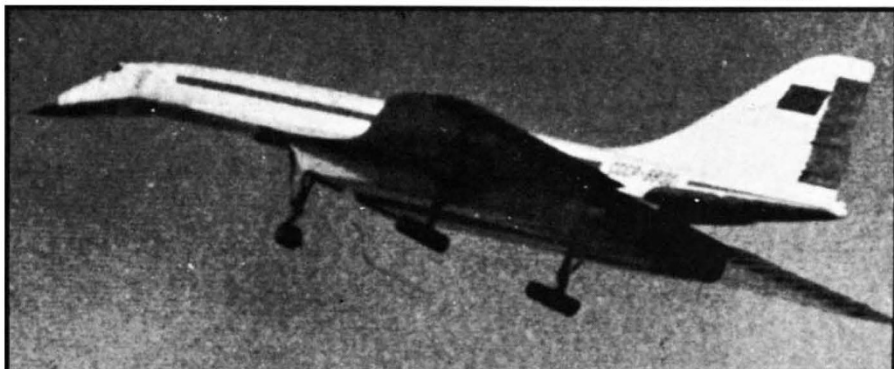
Peter Pockley, Sydney

A TEAM of three examiners from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is now in Australia for the first independent examination of the nation's organisation, funding and policies for science and technology. The team is led by Dr Alexander King, the OECD's Director-General for Scientific Affairs, who is an old hand at OECD science policy surveys; this will be his last one before retirement. Other members of the panel are Dr Friedrich Schneider of West Germany and Dr J. Wautrequin of Belgium.

Australia joined two dozen other nations as a member of the OECD just over two years ago and the current survey of Australia is the nation's first major examination under the organisation's critical microscope. The results should be interesting, not only for scientists but in a wider sphere as a measure of the nation's maturity in taking authoritative, international criticism on the chin and of the government's capacity for instigating sensible, perhaps radical, reforms which have not originated from internal, political pressures.

That such reforms may be recommended seems likely from the widely circulated comments of the OECD panel before its arrival in Australia at the end of March. Its comments were written in response to the background document prepared for the OECD by the Department of Science; they spoke of a good deal of thought being needed about weaknesses in the system, lack of balance and the need to develop in new directions. The OECD also noted the heavy concentration on government-run or government-sponsored science.

In a closely packed series of meetings, the team is now finding out for itself just how decisions of priority are made (or more to the point, how they are not made) in Australian science. Given the level of expenditure on research and development in Australia (now running at about \$A450 million a year), it may seem surprising that no similar survey has previously been conducted within Australia. Even now, there is no academic unit or independent institute in Australia which is professionally interested in the study of science policy on anything more than a part-time basis. The School of Sociology at the University of New South Wales is the nearest approximation to such a unit; senior staff are making a habit of spending sabbatical years in Britain at the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex.



The TU-144: traumatic crash

Russians in the air from our Soviet Correspondent

AVIATION has always been considered a 'prestige' achievement in the Soviet Union, from the early 1920s when the propagandists of atheism solemnly argued that "There is no God for our brave airmen have failed to find him," through the spectacular air-lift, in March-April 1934, which evacuated 104 icewrecked survivors (including the inevitable newborn infant) from the polar research ship 'Semen Chelyuskin', through the 1945 anniversary celebrations of the Academy of Sciences when Joukowski received almost as much acclaim as Stalin up to the present day and the maiden flight of the TU-154 jet airliner from Moscow to Helsinki on April 9. The highly publicised crash of the TU-144 at last year's Paris air show, therefore, must have been a traumatic experience, not only for the Soviet aviation industry but for all concerned in the mass media.

According to the tenets of Socialist Realism, the press and other media, including the fine arts, should strive to present, not the transient defects of the world as it is but a sort of Platonic ideal of what it one day will be. The aftermath of the TU-144 disaster has, therefore, resulted in an even greater than usual press coverage of the positive aspects of aviation.

Nevertheless, since the Paris disaster there seems to have been a change in Soviet aviation policy, as reflected in

the press coverage. Whereas in February 1973, an *Izvestiya* article could state that the decision of PanAm and TWA not to take up options on Concorde was dictated not by commercial but by political motivation (since the United States "have nothing to compete with Concorde or the TU-144"), now the stress is all on cooperation with the United States. In January, a five-year cooperation agreement was signed between Lockheed and the USSR State Committee for Science and Technology, providing for the joint development of civil aircraft construction, navigation systems and aviation electronics. The inauguration of the direct Moscow-Washington air route was hailed by *Pravda* as "a major contribution to the further development in the extension of mutually advantageous economic cooperation of two great powers". For the moment, the negative aspects of competition seem to be minimised.

And yet since Concorde (in conjunction with the TU 144) has always been presented in the Soviet press as Europe's answer to the American aviation "threat", it is perhaps not without significance that, according to the Novosti agency, a factory at Kramatorsk (Ukrainian SSR) has begun work on a 60,000-tonne hydraulic press for the manufacture of large scale components of Concorde supersonic airliners.