

10%; others, 3%. Broadly, says Tal, the three main objectives of the government are to secure a better spin-off from the military work which consumes such a vast proportion of the budget, to look for ways in which the excessive amount of university research can be used to support industrial projects, and to encourage industry to buck up and get on with its own research programmes. To this end incentive programmes are under way which weigh the grant distribution system heavily in favour of the researcher who opts for applied work. Tal points to countries like Switzerland and Sweden as examples of top level industrial producers whose excellence reflects their disproportionately high spending on industrial research. It must be remarked, however, that they have thoroughly complacent taxi drivers.

● In a country whose development depends as much on water as on anything else, it is not surprising that the discovery of new sources is followed by ambitious plans. After the war of 1967, and following a combination of biblical clues and intelligence reports, a search for underground water in the occupied Sinai desert led to the discovery of a considerable reservoir. Carbon dating studies show that this water originated 20,000–30,000 years ago and is therefore unreplenishable fossil water. But according to Arie Issar, a hydrologist at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, sufficient water can be tapped to support the equivalent of 60 new settlements for 50 years. More precisely, he estimates that the output could be 50 million cubic metres a year.

The Desert Research Institute of the Ben-Gurion University, set up in 1973, has a substantial interest in this new water source. Situated at Sde Boker in the Negev Desert, 30 miles south of the main university campus in Beer-

sheva, its scientists are undertaking a wide programme of desert research. They hope to be able to use the water to irrigate large areas of the Negev so that agricultural development can take place.

A combination of basic and applied research has been designed to tackle the problems that this project will have to solve. Apart from the general problems of establishing settlements in the desert and of making life bearable, or preferably attractive, for the settlers, there are more specific questions raised by the quality of the water. It has been found to be both warm (42° C) and somewhat brackish. The institute's scientists claim that the warmth may actually be an advantage when it comes to growing winter crops. The salinity is also unlikely to pose much problem since there are many crops that can cope with the salt levels involved. In addition it is hoped that a programme of plant breeding will yield other and better salt-resistant strains.

Another approach to persuading the desert to support more life than a few Bedouins is that of introducing alien vegetation which will grow even without irrigation. Two promising cases are *jejoba*, an American desert tree whose nuts are a source of high quality wax, and *atriplex*, an Australian fodder crop for grazing animals. Once the Negev is tamed, the planners see no end of exciting possibilities. There are promises, for example, of a series of safari parks teaming with African wild life. But right now it is not altogether clear when the promised water will flow into the area from the reservoirs.

● The decision of UNESCO to cut off aid to Israel was met with both sadness and bitterness in that country. Israel's president, Ephraim Katzir, felt that it was "the beginning of the destruction of civilised organisations" and ex-

pressed sorrow that politically motivated decisions, which were only to be expected in the UN itself had found their way into UNESCO affairs. To which sentiment the Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou Mbow, effectively replied in a statement that "the delegates to the general conference are government representatives. It is natural that the problems which perturb the world today should find an echo there".

In other words the oil monopoly and the political intricacies of the Middle East are justification for bringing sanctions to bear against the country which has done the most in that area in recent times for education, science and culture. For the alleged claim against Israel, that of endangering and disfiguring religious sites in the course of archaeological excavations in occupied Jerusalem, can not be taken very seriously. It is certainly a difficult job carrying out excavations in Jerusalem where every inch of land seems to be vied for by two or more religions, nowhere more so than at the disputed site outside the Western (Wailing) and Southern Walls of the Temple Mount. There is, however, next to no expert condemnation of the excavations so far undertaken there by the Archaeology Department of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Ironically Israel has actually benefited financially from the UNESCO decision—the UNESCO contribution to the costs of the excavations was only a quarter of the sum paid into UNESCO funds by Israel. And in terms of participation in UNESCO, the position seems to be unchanged, in that Israel's request to join the organisation's European regional group has not been granted. Israelis are disappointed at the lack of reaction from the scientific community abroad but grimly resigned to their increasing isolation. □

## Universities in the not-so-red

BRITISH universities have been spared some of the ravages of inflation by the decision of Mr Prentice, Secretary of State for Education and Science, to increase their recurrent grant by £15 million. This brings the total supplementation of the grant for 1974–75 to about £21 million, roughly what the universities had expected for that year on the basis of the rise in costs during 1973, which is how the government does its calculations.

Of course the rate of inflation has gone up since then, so, although the hard-pressed Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP)

welcomed the announcement, as a help to the universities in their "grave" situation arising from the high continuing rate of inflation, they warn that substantial economies will continue.

The Secretary of State will soon be able to announce the level of grant for the financial years 1975–76 and 1976–77. Universities must know this decision soon say the CVCP as they are already accepting students for 1975.

What will actually happen to the grants for the remaining two years of the quinquennium remains to be seen.

A warning note was struck by Mr Prentice in his announcement when he said that the level of grants in the future would have to take into account the fact that student numbers were not increasing.

## Visa for Voronel

Aleksandr Voronel, the Soviet physicist has received an exit visa for Israel.

In spite of official harassment, illicit Sunday seminars of scientists dismissed after applying for visas for Israel continued meeting during the Autumn in Moscow. On November 15, Voronel was told by the KGB that he could have permission to emigrate provided the seminars were discontinued. Voronel replied that he did not see the connection between his leaving the country and the seminars, which would stop only if the whole group were allowed to emigrate. Nevertheless even though the seminars had been continued in the interim, on December 11 Voronel received an exit visa valid until December 24. □