

Two Israeli university presidents, Professor Yuval Ne'eman of Tel Aviv University and Professor Moshe Prywes of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, have submitted their resignations in recent weeks. Each has his own reason: Ne'eman has accepted a top post in the Defence Ministry and Prywes has been put in charge of all Negev medical services (in addition to directing the operations of Ben-Gurion University's newly established medical school). But their decisions may also have been influenced by the increasing difficulties faced by all local university presidents, who are striving to meet costs that have risen by 30% to 40% in one year while income—from Israel's University Grants Committee and other sources—has remained virtually static or has even declined.

Their problems are further complicated by charges in the press that too much money is being devoted to higher education at a time when insufficient funds are available for primary and secondary schools. Much of the criticism is extraordinarily simplistic: comparisons are made, for example, between the sum spent on the education of a primary school child and the money spent on the training of a university student, without taking into account, among other things, the university's role as a research centre.

Also stemming from the current economic situation is the government request that Israeli professors either give up their sabbatical leave this year, or, alternatively, spend it at another local institution. Professor Amnon Rubinstein, of Tel Aviv University, believes the request is justified "in a year of military tension and economic crisis." His colleague at Tel Aviv University, Dr Benjamin Rulf, has, in contrast, received the idea very coolly. Rulf warns that overseas sabbaticals are an essential safeguard against "scientific degeneration."

It now seems that the professors who are supposed to go on sabbatical leave this year will be asked to remain in Israel, but that no binding regulations will be brought in.

Economies, meanwhile, are proceeding in other spheres. Classes at the Hebrew University, to give just one example, are ending this winter at 20.00 instead of 21.00 in order to cut down on lighting and heating costs. The university has also announced a freeze on the hiring of new personnel to fill vacant posts.

But such paring down around the edges will not be sufficient. Barring some drastic and unlikely increase in funds from either Israeli or overseas sources, large scale dismissals are inevitable. In fact, Tel Aviv University

has already stated that 400 posts will have to go—some through natural wastage, others through dismissals. Other universities are likely to follow suit.

- Research grants from overseas bodies continue to play an important role in keeping afloat Israeli institutions of higher learning. This is particularly true at the Weizmann Institute, whose scientists manage to obtain a good many grants in the face of fierce competition.

Among the recent grants to be announced at the Weizmann is one of \$146,000 from the National Cancer Institute of the US National Institutes of Health to Professor Leo Sachs for research into the carcinogenic properties of chemical compounds. It will help

Letter from Israel

from Nechemia Meyers

Sachs further develop his method, already adopted overseas, for testing suspect chemicals in tissue culture rather than in experimental animals.

German funds are as important a source of support of Weizmann Institute research as money from the USA, the traditional sugar-daddy of international science. The Minerva Fund, a subsidiary of the Max Planck Society, is alone providing DM5 million to finance 64 projects at the Weizmann Institute during 1975.

Industrially sponsored research at the Weizmann (and elsewhere) is growing, but still leaves much to be desired. Rehovot scientists, for example, have \$1.25 million in industrial research contracts, 70% from overseas companies and 30% from Israeli ones. Most agreements, negotiated by the Yeda Research and Development Company, involve plastics, chemicals or pharmaceuticals.

- Mr Issac Fleischmann, Director of the US Patent Office's Information Service, suggested during his recent visit that Israelis, in addition to developing their own processes and devices, should make a more vigorous effort to exploit those developed in other countries.

Fleischmann pointed out that relatively few patents have been issued in Israel, which means that hundreds of thousands of ideas protected elsewhere may be borrowed freely for use here. He found it strange that there are so few Israeli subscribers to the US Patent Office's *Official Gazette of Patents*, which each week carries a summary of

some 1,500 or 1,600 newly granted patents (about the number issued in Israel, to both local and overseas applicants, in the course of a full year).

- An (unpatented) Israeli development which should be of interest overseas is "Help Pollution", a game of the Monopoly ilk now being used as a teaching aid in high school biology classes. Created at Bar-Ilan University by Dr Uri Yoel, it is won by the player who is most successful in his attempt to prevent pollution of the Sea of Galilee, the country's main fresh water reservoir, which is facing a very real pollution threat from the inflow of municipal sewage and agricultural fertilisers, as well as from the rubbish left around its shores.

As in Monopoly, players acquire property around the lake and then try to increase its value. To do so they must prevent pollution of their land and of the lake by, among other things, investing money in anti-pollution measures. Uncertainty is added by accidents, such as DDT seeping into the water.

- While Israeli schools teach youngsters to protect their country's environment, Israel's national radio and television stations are playing a song which glorifies a man for inscribing his name on a public building. He is Baruch Jamili, a soldier in the 1948 War of Independence, who chose to write his name in tar on a water pumping station near Jerusalem. Seeing the name 25 years later, the song writer and singer Shlomo Artzi wrote "The Ballad of Baruch Jamili", which presented Jamili as a war hero and won the last Israel Song Festival.

The outraged Nature Reserves Association promptly issued a statement strongly attacking the song, which, it fears, will encourage non-heroes to inscribe their own names on public buildings.

Graffiti are not a new problem here, as witnessed by the inscriptions that have been left all over the area for untold centuries. But the signature of a Crusader knight on the wall of a dining hall in Sinai's Santa Katerina Monastery is history whereas a signature added by a contemporary visitor is regarded as vandalism.

A unique attempt to let the graffiti artists express themselves, and yet safeguard the environment, is being made at a scenic canyon in the Negev desert, near the Red Sea port of Eilat. Taking a positive approach, the local authorities have set aside a special slab of rock where visitors are invited to carve or write their names.

They are politely requested to leave the rest of the canyon untouched.