

by refusing to pass the government's money supply plans. On the other hand, the Opposition itself is wracked by a leadership struggle, with, interestingly enough, the Liberals' last Minister for Education and Science, Mr Malcolm Fraser (a right winger), emerging as the strongest challenger to Mr Bill Snedden.

In the face of these running political issues, science still seems pretty small beer. The Minister for Science, Mr Bill Morrison, just made it into the ministry after the election in May 1974—he came 27th out of 27 in the elections to Cabinet by his parliamentary colleagues. It is not entirely surprising therefore that it took until two weeks before ANZAAS, and over two years after he was first elected to the ministry, for him to gain sufficient priority in Cabinet to present his first major submission relating to science policy. Some commentators, however, have felt that Mr Morrison has been content to let things drift for, apart from the consumer cause which he has espoused with some energy, he has seen little political advantage to be gained in science.

The two-year wait has been a frustrating one for those Australian scientists who had been looking to Labour for action. Labour had a science policy in its Party Platform for some time in contrast to the Liberals' steadfast refusal to acknowledge the very possibility of, or need for, a coordinated approach to science. The year 1974, however, brought forth a rash of documents and discussions which have led to the final formulation of ASTEC, and no interested party can now complain that their voice has not been heard. There are some, though, whose voice may have been heard but not heeded. Notable in this category must be the Department of Science whose heads can hardly be happy with the statements in the White Paper launching ASTEC which show that the department's role in recommending policy to the government will be subordinate to that of ASTEC.

Mr Morrison's major move towards gaining a consensus about a science council was the invitation to the OECD to carry out one of its independent surveys of science policy. This study, under the leadership of the redoubtable Dr Alexander King, was carried out early in 1974 and led to a preliminary report by the OECD and one of their "confrontation" meetings in Paris last autumn. Meanwhile, ANZAAS had established a Science Policy Commission under the chairmanship of Professor Sol Encel, a sociologist at the University of New South Wales, who is one of Australia's few professional students of science policy. Its report was published in the November

1974 issue of ANZAAS's journal, *Search*.

With some differences in detail and emphasis, both the OECD and ANZAAS recommendations converged on the need for a council to embrace not just traditional science, as favoured in the earlier discussions, but also technology, medicine and the social sciences. The Academy of Science also played an important role in influencing the final shape of ASTEC but, as is its wont, the academy worked more in private than in public.

It is impossible at this stage to assess the degree of acceptance by the Australian scientific community of the ASTEC arrangements. The White Paper was officially released to coincide with the start of the ANZAAS Congress, but the distribution was ineptly handled and few congress delegates even had sight of a copy before the major symposia at the congress where the issues involved were discussed. A meeting to discuss the ANZAAS report mustered a mere 70 in the audience.

But it is already clear that Mr Morrison's proposals (he claims to have largely written the White Paper himself with help from his staff—there is no evident love affair between the minister and his public servants) comprise a minor political victory in three areas, all of which will be welcomed by Australian scientists. These involve the terms of reference and powers of ASTEC to encompass not only science, but also technology, the medical sciences and defence science (within the limits of security). To the disappointment of some, ASTEC's role in relation to the social sciences is not at present intended to extend beyond the interaction of the social and natural sciences, as in multidisciplinary studies of complex problems.

The political victory comes in that funding of research and development technology, medicine and defence have come exclusively under ministries other than Science, and this has contributed substantially to the fragmentation and lack of direction in Australia's overall science effort. Proposals for the integration of these disparate elements will have to be formulated with great

bureaucratic and political skill by the members of ASTEC, and therein will lie a major test of its potential influence in the science scene in Australia.

The Labour Party's Platform had advocated that the members of a science council be elected by the scientific community; this has been abandoned in favour of the traditional method—appointment by the Minister, who significantly for the status of ASTEC will formally be the Prime Minister. ASTEC will be unusually sensitive to the quality of its first appointees, and further significant commentary on it may have to await that announcement.

● Gough Whitlam himself gave a paper at the 'Grand Symposium' on the final night. Recently returned from extensive foreign travels, he shared the platform with the Presidents of the Academies of Science, Social Sciences and the Humanities in an evening of remarkably good public speaking. His speech was mainly directed at the rationale behind the science policy White Paper, but he surprised the audience by taking the floor again after the main speeches to deal firmly with issues raised—particularly some questioning of his uranium policy and some remarks about trying to keep academics, particularly in the humanities, from emigrating. Professor J. Passmore (Academy of the Humanities) had been bemoaning the poor quality of Australian libraries and the great delays in the arrival of journals.

Nowhere on his travels, Whitlam said, had anyone suggested that the uranium should be kept in the ground, although he was fully aware of proliferation problems and hoped to "do something" about them.

On emigration, he professed no concern. Maybe the scholars move away but the practitioners come back to play, sing, paint and so on. Not quite the same thing, muttered the audience as they left, dazed that even a mild bit of politicking had entered their sedate arena. And there wasn't a glimmer of a response to Passmore's gentle suggestion that the government might air-freight journals from Europe and North America. □

Must new universities be poor relatives?

● In 1946 there were 25,600 students in six Australian universities. In 1972 there were 128,000 in eighteen. But there is a failure rate of 30% and many academics speak with concern of the quality of staff in some of the newer universities. If these universities are not to be seen as poor relatives, they face a long haul of consolidation. There

could be a major role for CSIRO in this. The OECD report speaks of a need for greater mobility amongst Australian scientists and it may be that the new universities, armed with this report, should seek strengthening of their staff through more direct collaboration and exchange with CSIRO.