

Mr Wilkinson gave a figure of £5,500 millions for development costs. The aircraft would sell for about £65 millions, and use a turbofan derivative of the Rolls-Royce Olympus 593 engine presently powering Concorde. But, he added, there should be only one design. This would mean another joint international venture, which might include the Soviet Union as well as the USA.

Rolls-Royce meanwhile successfully completed a £100 millions deal at the weekend with the Chinese National Technical Import Corporation under which China will, over the next two years, import a limited number of Spey turbofan engines manufactured in Britain. Rolls Royce will supply the Chinese with the expertise they need to manufacture the engines under licence. The licence itself covers both military and civil versions of the turbofan, and Rolls-Royce are understood to be supplying afterburners along with the complete engines. With China already heavily committed to the Hawker Siddeley Trident, which is fitted with Spey engines, the reinforcement of the link with British aerospace technology encouraged speculation about the status of options China has on three Concorde.

● European cooperation on another project, the Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MRCA), received a bit of a boost with the signing late last week of a contract for the initial investment required to start production. The contract, worth several million pounds, was signed by the NATO Military Management Agency (NAMMA), which runs the programme for the three governments involved, West Germany, Italy and the UK. It authorises a three-nation airframe consortium to start work. The production go-ahead itself, for more than 800 aircraft, is expected next year. □

Pollution proposals

by Allan Piper

A PROPOSAL for blanket legislation to standardise pollution levels within the European community was modified last week when EEC environment ministers meeting in Brussels reached a compromise which will allow member states some flexibility in the administration of pollution controls. Instead of observing pollution limits based on measurements of waste levels at the source of emission, members will be able to opt for a scheme whereby pollutant concentrations are monitored after dispersion into the environment. In considering each case on its individual merits the scheme will allow some countries to dump more toxic waste than others.

The agreement represents something of an achievement for the UK Government which, with the backing of its Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, had opposed the Commission's proposals for uniform standards. With an alternative available, the UK can continue its present policy of using "quality controls" to restrain the dumping of toxic wastes like cadmium and mercury.

The wrangle between the UK and its EEC partners began when the environment ministers last met in Luxembourg in October. The UK then rejected the Commission's call for the introduction of so-called 'emission norms'—uniform standards based on the levels of toxic waste actually produced from any source. The UK argument in favour of quality controls was based on the view that EEC member states had diverse environments which could accommodate widely differing concentrations of pollutants. The northern Atlantic off the Scottish coast, the argument ran, was more easily able to disperse a given level of toxic substances than the coastal waters of the Adriatic.

The latest agreement, which came as a surprise, means that while the Commission will stand by its original proposal for emission norms, individual members can opt for quality control. But there is a caveat. They must satisfy the Commission that their controls are equally effective in maintaining levels below the prescribed limits. The UK Department of the Environment is confident that Britain will have no difficulty in meeting this condition.

The quality controls will be re-examined by the Council every five years. Meanwhile the finer details of the two systems will be drafted. The Commission has two years to complete its proposals which will then go before the Council for approval. Once approved, the member states will begin arrangements to implement the necessary legislation. Since this will probably take about five years altogether, the UK's present pollution policy is unlikely to come under further EEC scrutiny for about a decade.

The main opposition to the idea of control by quality norms came from West Germany and Holland, both of which have to contend with the peculiarly acute pollution problems posed by the Rhine. Their antagonism apparently stemmed from their concern that favourably located countries like Britain should not gain unfair commercial advantages by not being required to bear the individual cost of complying with uniform legislation. UK industry could have been faced with a bill estimated at £750 millions had the original community proposal remained unmodified. □

Kovalev sentenced

from Vera Rich, London

ON the very day that he was due to receive his Nobel Peace Prize, Dr Andrei Sakharov was in Vil'nyus unsuccessfully seeking admission to the trial of Dr Sergei Kovalev, a biologist and member of the banned Moscow group of Amnesty International.

Dr Kovalev was arrested a year ago on various charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" and "slandering the Soviet Union". These included the production and distribution of *samizdat* journals and of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and also the circulation of the illegal *Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, which provided the reason for holding the trial in Vil'nyus rather than Moscow. Dr Kovalev is not a Lithuanian, nor, so far as is known, has he any connection with the Catholic Church. His only connection with the *Chronicle* seems to have been that when his flat was searched, a few pages from a Russian-language edition of it were found among his collection of *samizdat* materials.

If it was hoped that by changing the venue the trial might attract less notice, this was largely vitiated by Dr Sakharov's presence, which helped to ensure that world attention was focused on the Vil'nyus courtroom. Also present in Vil'nyus, and unable to gain admission to the courtroom, was physicist Yuri Orlov, a friend of both Kovalev and Sakharov. Kovalev was sentenced to seven years' jail with hard labour and three years' exile.

During the Vil'nyus hearing the case was recalled of another dissident, the Ukrainian mathematician Leonid Plyushch, held in a penal psychiatric institution on account of his dissident and "separatist" views. Plyushch has been a cause celebre for all those who have campaigned against alleged misuses of psychiatry for political ends. Recently, after a massive rally and campaign in France, in which left-wing and communist organisations played a considerable part, the Soviet authorities promised Mrs Plyushch that her husband would shortly be set at liberty. No definite information as to a release date has been given, but according to dissident sources, one of the psychiatrists who had been treating Plyushch was called to give evidence against Dr Kovalev and stated that he had lied when he wrote that dissidents were being confined in mental hospitals as a means of political repression.

Meanwhile Mrs Sakharov has reportedly criticised the western press for emphasising the difficulties of Soviet intellectuals instead of the idea that "an innocent man ought to have nothing to fear in our country". □