

IN BRIEF

Ford statement attacked

President Ford was given a sharp rap over the knuckles last week by 10 Nobel prizewinners and one former Presidential science adviser for trying to make political capital out of the fact that the United States made a clean sweep of this year's Nobel prizes. Presenting the National Medal of Science to 15 American scientists last month, he took the opportunity to score a few political points, and without mentioning Jimmy Carter by name said that the Nobel sweep would "surely put to rest" suggestions that the United States had lost respect around the world. He then argued that there is a need to "bolster research and development to achieve national goals".

The remarks, and their implication that the Administration should share the credit for the Nobel awards, were attacked in a statement drafted by George Kistiakowsky, professor of Chemistry at Harvard and former science adviser to President Eisenhower, and signed by 10 Nobel prize-

winners including the winner of this year's award for Chemistry, William Lipscomb. The statement noted that "Nobel Prizes usually reflect work done over long periods of time. This year's prizes do not, therefore, reflect this year's strengths". The statement went on to argue that Mr Ford's budgets "have not been such as to encourage the growth of American science. The current appropriation for the National Science Foundation is actually 10% lower than it was in the year when Mr Ford took office." Other signatories were Kenneth Arrow, Julius Axelrod, David Baltimore, Owen Chamberlain, Carl Cori, Donald Glaser, Salvador Luria, E. M. Purcell and George Wald.

ESF optimism

At the conclusion of the European Science Foundation's second annual general assembly in Strasbourg last week the president of its Executive Council, Sir Brian Flowers, said he detected the emergence of a single European voice in science. The

assembly had accepted the findings of ad hoc committees on genetic manipulation and astronomy.

One material consequence is that a European committee will be established under the aegis of the ESF both to discuss recombinant DNA research and to keep under continuous review the guidelines covering it. The committee will consist of representatives of the various national advisory bodies concerned together with representatives from both the EMBO Standing Advisory Committee and the European Medical Research Councils.

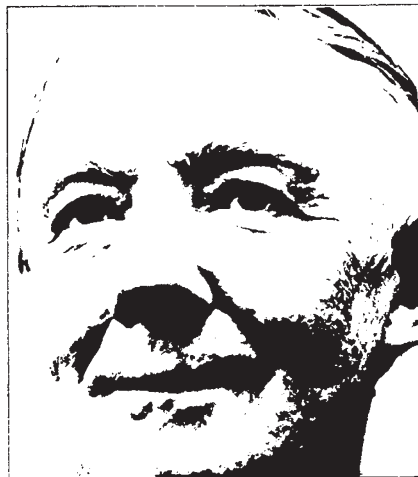
Acceptance of the astronomy committee's recommendations means that Europe's instrumental resources will soon be concentrated on a mountain ridge of La Palma in the Canary Islands. The first major step would involve moving the British Isaac Newton Telescope; Sweden's instruments now at Anacapri in Italy would follow, and a new Austrian telescope would come later. The Observatory itself would be Spanish.

At 10.30 a couple of Sundays ago I cut a tape across a footpath and led a crowd of 361 men, women and children on a sponsored walk around Grafham Water, one of the largest man-made lakes in southern England. Our purpose was to raise money for the Ouse Valley Wildlife Appeal to enable the Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Naturalists Trust, a voluntary conservation organisation of which I am president, to buy land for nature reserves. Almost all the walkers completed the modest circuit of ten miles, and so called upon the maximum generosity from those who had agreed to support the appeal, at rates ranging from a halfpenny to a pound a mile. My own efforts produced £56.20; the whole exercise raised more than £2,000. The Trust's last acquisition was Upwood Meadows, 14 acres of botanically interesting meadow probably unploughed since the Black Death; it cost us £5,000, so the walk paid off the debt on about five acres.

England is one of the most crowded areas in the world. The growing population, industry, affluence and increasing mobility are putting intense pressure on wild plants and animals and on the habitats which support them. Modern agriculture is changing the look of the countryside, and the wholesale removal of hedgerows and copses means that many birds, butterflies and flowers which were formerly common and widespread are difficult for the non-expert to find. Sites for scientific study, for

education and for ecological research are disappearing.

Fortunately there are in Britain official bodies like the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside

Walks for wildlife**KENNETH MELLANBY**

Commission which are charged with conserving wildlife and rural amenity, and this they do admirably in the limit of their meagre resources. It is encouraging that the Nature Conservancy Council has been able to designate an increasing number of outstanding National Nature Reserves in recent years, by purchase, lease or "nature reserve agreement". This last system is one by which liberally-minded landlords agree to restrict their activities so that the area will

retain its scientific importance. It is feared, however, that new legislation may compel some such landlords or their heirs to sell their property, and that the buyers may be less willing to give priority to a few rare orchids or to wildfowl.

It is therefore fortunate that official efforts are so often supplemented, and sometimes surpassed, by the many voluntary conservationist organisations in Britain. Critics may complain that conservationists are mainly a middle class elitist group, and this is to some extent true—and why not—but they are making great efforts to bring all sections of the population into their ranks.

Many of the reserves established by County Naturalists Trusts are conveniently situated to be used as open-air classrooms by local schools. When the pupils become involved in strenuous management exercises, such as removing unwanted scrub which is crowding out the more exciting plants, they may become converts to conservation. Even sponsored walks involve a new section of the population, and if, as at Grafham, these go through reserves with simple nature trails marking clearly some of the points of importance, the walkers' temporary interest may be made permanent. It is estimated that nearly five thousand of those who sponsored the walkers were not otherwise concerned with conservation; perhaps the success of the venture will turn their sympathy to real interest and support.