

## BRITAIN

**ICRF appointment**

*The Imperial Cancer Research Fund has announced a new director for its research laboratories. Chris Sherwell reports*

THE Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) last week announced the appointment of Walter Bodmer, Professor of Genetics at Oxford, to succeed the present director of its research laboratories, Dr Michael Stoker. Stoker, a virologist, leaves the post he has held since 1968 a year early, in September 1979, when he is 61; he returns to academic life and research in Cambridge. Bodmer, 41, a population geneticist involved more recently in immunology and tissue typing, has held his Oxford chair since 1970.

Bodmer said this week that nothing significant should be read into the fact that a geneticist was replacing a virologist. In welcoming the appointment, however, Stoker described the appointment of a geneticist as "very timely", paralleling in its recognition of contemporary developments his own appointment as a virologist years earlier. Over the next couple of decades, he said, the cancer problem would be dissected at the molecular genetics level, specifically in the realm of mutagenesis. Bodmer was "one of the leading younger geneticists in the country", with an all-round ability as well as a specialisation in the human leucocyte antigen (HLA) system.

Though Bodmer will almost certainly be receiving a higher salary than he currently enjoys, the real attractions are the opportunities, facilities and support ICRF offers. He recognises that he will be giving up one sort of administration for another, but hopes not to be too tied down by such matters. There will be no teaching, no university committees, a curtailed administrative load outside but—most importantly—an allotment of space at the ICRF's sophisticated laboratories in Lincoln's Inn Fields, central London. This he can fill with his own appointments—perhaps up to a dozen—who will continue the research he has led at Oxford, though perhaps with a change of emphasis. He says he will establish an HLA typing lab there.

In spite of recent allegations about the way ICRF uses its money, which drew a sharp response from ICRF and subsequently a libel suit for the paper that made them, Bodmer sees the job as no more controversial than any similar one in universities and other

research institutes which have to justify their particular paths in research. That the job is important he has no doubt—"otherwise I wouldn't be moving". It combines, he says, "the best opportunities for biochemical research in the country". But if the post hadn't come along, he would not be leaving the country, though he admits the alternatives beyond Oxford are limited.

Both Bodmer and Stoker believe in the virtues of limited tenure as a means of maintaining high quality in research. The same purpose is also served, both men believe, by the presence of foreign visitors, another distinguishing feature of ICRF research. Stoker is a firm advocate of another controversial view relating to research—that of early retirement from positions of power. This belief, along with his appointment as Foreign Secretary at the Royal Society, which has dragged him from his research, has encouraged his own departure. He adds that two years is the sort of notice that has to be given for a job like this.

Thus the far-reaching changes of which the ICRF Council chairman, Sir Eric Scowen, spoke in his annual report (published at the end of March) are now coming to pass. The announcement of a new man to head the biggest single private research effort in the country is the outcome of a search conducted by a special ICRF committee over the past few months. Stoker's intention to relinquish his post was confirmed in the annual report; and Stoker's deputy, Dr Renato Dulbecco, retired last month. The post of deputy will remain vacant until Bodmer takes up his appointment and makes his own choice. In the meantime the deputy's role is handled by Dr John Cairns, who heads ICRF's lab at Mill Hill. □



Walter Bodmer

## USSR

**Space retrieval**

THE cancellation of the *Soyuz 25/Salyut 6* link-up coincided most unfortunately with the celebration meeting held on October 11 to mark the 20th anniversary of *Sputnik 1*. This anniversary had been invested with considerable importance by the Soviet authorities.

In his anniversary address, Academician Boris N. Petrov, head of the *Interkosmos* programme, did his best to retrieve the situation. Reviewing the events of the last twenty years, he stressed especially the successes of the automatic space probes and the *lunokhody* and Venus descent craft in particular. Even the *Salyut* space stations, he noted, were designed to operate in both manned and unmanned modes, and in either could "solve important problems of science and technology". Since the (manned) *Soyuz* programme already had two major setbacks in the past three years (*Soyuz 15* in 1974 and *Soyuz 23* in 1976 both failing to achieve a link-up with the *Salyut* stations), Petrov naturally concentrated on the more successful unmanned ventures.

Ironically, however, it was not the crew but the automatic part of the *Soyuz 25* mission which was responsible for its failure. The main part of the link-up programme is effected automatically by the *Soyuz* on-board computer with possibly some orbital adjustments of the *Salyut* by ground control. This system operates to within 120 m of link-up, after which the cosmonauts take over the control for final approach. What appears to have happened in recent aborted missions is that the automatic system has over-shot such that the *Soyuz* has not had sufficient power reserves to attempt a second, manually-controlled pass.

Although some *Soyuz* craft have carried solar panels to recharge their batteries, it seems likely that on the *Soyuz 25* these were sacrificed to permit additional weight to be allotted to stores and/or experimental equipment. This would tie in with speculations that the crew were to attempt to break the current Soviet record of 63 days or the US record of 84 days in space.

It is not impossible, however, that a further attempt to link up with *Salyut 7* will be made before the 60th anniversary of the Revolution next month.

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