

news in brief

MRC calls for more research students despite poor job market: In a generally bleak annual report, the UK Medical Research Council (MRC) has announced it is to recruit young scientists "despite the current shortage of long term career openings in the universities". However, the MRC will introduce three new measures to alleviate some of problems of the most able research workers and to bolster confidence that the UK will provide opportunities for scientists of "really high ability to develop their talents". The new measures are: a salary grant scheme to permit university staff to work full time on research projects of a very high standard; a similar scheme to provide a small number of clinical research posts for clinical academic staff in the country's medical schools; and five-year renewable fellowships for "particularly able people" to bridge the period between a researcher's first employment and subsequent permanent post. The MRC aims to appoint three such fellows a year, building up to a total of 15.

The report makes no mention of scientists currently in employment on short term contracts. According to a recent AUT estimate there are 5,000 researchers in the UK on short-term contracts funded by the MRC and an additional 1,700 registered as unemployed with the Department of Employment. (*Medical Research Council Annual Report 1977-78* (HMSO) £3.75).

Czech Chartist jailed for nine months: Dr Jaroslav Sabata, a former professor of psychology and one of the three spokesmen of the Czechoslovak Charter 77 human rights group, was sentenced last week to nine months' imprisonment on the formal charge of "insulting a police official". Dr Sabata, who was a prominent Communist Party official during the "Prague Spring" of 1968 and who has since served five years of a seven year prison sentence for dissident activities, is a fervent advocate of closer links between the human rights movement in East European countries. His arrest last October near the Polish-Czech frontier took place during a series of meetings between the Czech Chartists and the Polish "Committee for Social Self-Defence". Authorities on both sides of the frontier tried to prevent the meetings.

During the trial, the procurator described Sabata as a "criminal" whose activities threatened the whole Czechoslovak people—a clear indication that his real offence in official eyes is his constant campaigning for personal, political and academic freedom.

Australia restructures its science planning: Following the report of the first inquiry into the functioning of the Commonwealth Science and Industry Research Organisation (CSIRO) since 1949, the Australian Government has announced a restructuring of CSIRO's top management to "facilitate closer liaison between researchers and users of research results, particularly industry". Described as an "update" rather than a "shake-up", the move organises the 37 CSIRO divisions with their staff of 7,000 into five institutes, each with a new director. The old executive structure of five full-time members and four part-timers has been replaced by a new policy-making body composed of three full-time members plus the directors of the new institutes. The identity of the 37 divisions has been preserved and the autonomy of CSIRO is not affected.

The new groupings and their directors are: Institute of Animal Sciences (Dr K. A. Ferguson); Institute of Biological Resources (Mr M. V. Tracey); Institute of Earth Resources (Mr I. E. Newman); Institute of Industrial Technology (Professor Emeritus H. W. Worner); Institute of Physical Sciences (director to be appointed); and the Bureau of Scientific Services (Mr S. Lattimore).

Ustinov on Einstein: Peter Ustinov (right), actor, writer and director, will on 14 March introduce and narrate a special two-hour BBC television programme celebrating the centenary of Einstein's birth. Ustinov, for whom mathematics and science were a total mystery when he was at school, has proved to be "a perfect student", according to producer Martin Freeth. The programme will concentrate on general relativity, the most difficult of Einstein's theories and features experimental and theoretical physicists Kenneth Brecher, Wallace Sargent, Irwin Shapiro, Roger Penrose, John Wheeler, Sidney Drell and Dennis Sciama. Written by Nigel Calder, the programme was filmed on location at the 107 inch reflecting telescope at the McDonald Observatory of the University of Texas. The programme will also use supporting film from other research centres showing current research results that support Einstein's theory.



Expanding Third World does not bring unemployment: Developing countries no longer simply sell raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods but are becoming manufacturing nations in their own right, and their increase in productive capacity is now being felt in the industrialised countries. Between 1972 and 1976, imports of manufactured goods to EEC countries increased from \$27 billion to \$76 billion. Experts consulted by the EEC have now cautioned against imposing trade barriers, saying that European industry must be adjusted to make it more competitive by "transferring production from stagnant or declining industrial sectors to those with a more promising outlook."

The effects on employment, while potentially serious, are held by EEC experts to be insignificant. Industrial employment began to decline in 1965. Using the UK as an example, the job losses attributable to Third World competition are 0.05% in textiles, 0.4% in the shoe industry, 0.8% in cotton fabrics and 1.7% in clothing. The real problem, say the experts, is the shifts caused by the new international division of labour which is causing job changes for European workers rather than unemployment *per se*. (*euroforum*, 12 December, 1978.)

Miners oppose nuclear power station near Newcastle: The National Union of Miners (NUM) is mounting a campaign to oppose a Central Electricity Generating Board plan to build a nuclear power station at Druridge Bay, near Blyth. Mr Sam Scott, secretary of the Northumberland region of the NUM, said: "The CEGB is proposing a nuclear plant on top of one of the biggest combined coal pits in Europe and parallel to parkland held by the National Trust. It's stupid".

But Mr A. D. Nash, of the CEGB's planning department, said the plan was "only an exploration of options". There was no commitment to nuclear power. CEGB projections based on an annual 2%–3% growth in demand indicated that new capacity would be needed by the end of the 1980s which could be supplied either by coal or nuclear power. With the six-year lead times necessary to build new plant, it was necessary to explore the options now, Mr Nash said. The miners, along with the National Coal Board, are seeking assurances from the CEGB that coal consumption in the area will not be cut.