

news in brief

SRC action puts new pressure on short-term contract workers: The Science Research Council has proposed a shift in funding emphasis from staff to equipment in a letter, written, "as a matter of urgency", to senior administrators at universities, colleges and polytechnics. Expressing concern about possible expenditure cuts arising from "the present industrial troubles", the council considers that the best way it can help research at present is to encourage applications for equipment. The council says "we cannot make additional major commitments to research grants which involve substantial expenditure over a period of several years such as those in which the provision of staff plays an important part". It urges speedy application before the next grant closing date of 1 April. [Brian Oakley, SRC secretary, says it is only partly a worry about the economic climate that has caused the shift in emphasis. "Good applications depend on good people and using the money for a three-year grant splurge will not bring in the young people that are necessary to swell the number of good applications."]. Research workers on short-term contracts have expressed dismay at the SRC's action. "By spending money in this way, the SRC ignores the proven quality of senior researchers as shown by successive grant renewals through the highly competitive SRC grant selection process. Instead, the council is adopting a cynical policy of recruitment of younger workers who are cheaper and less knowledgeable about the system", says Robert Golub of the committee for long-term non-tenured faculty at Sussex University.



Levich appointed to New York chair: Professor Benjamin Levich (left), the Soviet dissident who was allowed to leave last year after a long campaign on his behalf by western scientists, has been appointed to the Albert Einstein chair in science at the City College of the City University of New York. Professor Levich has already become affiliated to Tel Aviv University in Israel. Dr Robert J. Kibbee, chancellor of City University, said last week that the appointment "helps to im-

plement an earlier agreement of cooperation reached between City University and Israeli universities." City College hopes to establish with Tel Aviv University a joint institute for applied chemical physics under Professor Levich's leadership.

Congolese geneticist still detained: This month marks the second anniversary of the arrest of Pascal Lissouba, agricultural geneticist and former Prime Minister of the Congo. Since his arrest and summary trial in March 1977, Professor Lissouba has been held under harsh conditions in the prison at Ouesso in the northern Congo. He is known to be seriously ill with kidney disease.

The Congolese Labour Party—theoretically the ruling body—is to hold its Third Extraordinary Congress later this month, and it is hoped that certain political detainees may be released in an amnesty for the occasion. The Congolese government, however, categorically denies having any political prisoners at all, and maintains that Professor Lissouba was involved in the assassination of President Nguabi in 1977.

Detailed enquiries by Amnesty International (whose charter precludes intervention in cases of political violence)

failed to find any substance in this charge—indeed, Professor Lissouba was adopted as an Amnesty International "Prisoner of the Month".

Professor Lissouba's arrest and imprisonment are almost certainly due to his political career during the 1960s. Although he had resigned the Premiership in 1966, after a disagreement with the then President, Massamba-Debat, and withdrew finally from politics in 1969, in order to devote himself to his work in cell biology, he was still, apparently, considered a focus of potential political opposition.

In 1976, when the military government was facing a general strike, Professor Lissouba was placed under house arrest for a time and deprived of his position as Professor of Cellular Biology at Brazzaville University. At the time of his arrest, he was under a restraining order forbidding him to leave the country.

Dow fights ban on 2, 4, 5-T: The Dow Chemical Company and 10 other plaintiffs are seeking an injunction to prevent the US Environmental Protection Agency enforcing its ban on the sale of the herbicides 2, 4, 5-T and Wilvex. They argue that the ban is based on a "seriously flawed study" which linked miscarriages in Oregon with herbicide spraying in nearby forests. They have asked a district court judge in Michigan, the chemical company's home state, to declare the EPA's emergency suspension orders "arbitrary and capricious", and to set them aside. The EPA has agreed to hold hearings requested by Dow and five other chemical manufacturers and users to consider lifting the emergency ban.

UKAEA responds to environmentalists' demands: The UK Atomic Energy Authority has agreed to let Friends of the Earth publish a critique of the Inhaber report on alternative energy in its magazine ATOM, subject to review by Professor F. R. Farmer, the AEA's health and safety adviser (1 March 1979). The AEA will also give FOE space to criticise Lord Rothschild's Dimbleby lecture on risk and will circulate a notice with its release of Rothschild's lecture saying that a contrary view is available.

California law on nuclear waste "unconstitutional": A federal judge in California has ruled that the state's law prohibiting the construction of nuclear power plants until a waste disposal system has been approved by the federal government is unconstitutional. The law has meant the virtual abandonment of plans for further nuclear power stations in California. Uncertainty over methods for disposing of nuclear waste has also led to similar moratoria in other states. Judge William B. Enright, however, ruled that the state law disrupted national plans for the development of nuclear energy, and that such preemption of the federal government was unconstitutional.

GMAG must cover industrial research, says the minister: Early fears that the widespread use of genetic engineering might be hazardous if organisms containing recombinant DNA were to escape "may have been mis-stated", Mrs Shirley Williams, UK Secretary of State for Education and Science told the House of Commons Select on Science and Technology last week. Nevertheless she does not think that this would justify moving "as far as NIH" in relaxing guidelines. In particular she feels that industrial research must come under GMAG's remit even though its inclusion means that some members must leave during discussions of a commercial nature. "If we said that no one could withdraw then we would have no industrial members or a lack of cooperation from industry".