

Czechoslovakia strengthens science and technology

LAST year, Czechoslovakia embarked on what was described as a "complex experiment in effectiveness and quality control"—which to Western observers seemed virtually a reform of the economy save that "economic reform", to the Czechs, is an expression tainted by memories of the Dubcek regime. Last month, the meeting of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly carried the tendency further, by virtually rejecting the figures for the next Five Year Plan—an event unprecedented in the history of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

One change associated with the "complex experiment" was the re-organisation of the pay structure for scientific and tutorial staff at universities and other higher educational institutions. Addressing the Federal Assembly last month, Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal observed: "The salary conditions of scientific and tutorial staff of the higher educational institutes [polytechnics and universities] were regulated with effect from 1 October, 1978. We believe this, however, to be only one partial step designed to raise the interest of specialists from scientific and research institutes [which do no teaching] and from practical places of work in taking up jobs in higher educational institutes."

Although details of the new "con-

ditions" are not forthcoming, the trend accords with the general tenor of Strougal's speech and the other discussions in the General Assembly.

Czechoslovakia is the most reluctant member of the Comecon bloc when it comes to the purchase of foreign technology or know-how; the economic proposals outlined last month envisaged a cut-back in imports of all kinds and a greater dependence on home resources.

Officially, this change was linked to the word energy situation. Since September, 1976, when the Soviet Union suddenly increased oil prices to Comecon, Czechoslovakia has had a growing energy problem, which has been only partially met by the staggering of working hours. Strougal's speech contained six major proposals in the energy sector: expansion of capital expenditure on home fuel and energy production, a crash programme for the development of the North Bohemian lignite reserves, intensified research into the "complex of problems" ranging from investment to social welfare) associated with plan fulfilment in the deep mines of the Ostrava-Karvina area, an extension of nuclear generating capacity to 3,500 MW by 1978 and 8,000-10,000 MW by 1990, further participation in transit programmes, allowing "various forms

of energy" (eg, natural gas) from the Soviet Union to cross Czechoslovak territory and the implementation of fuel-saving programmes, aimed at saving some 20m tonnes of fuel per year.

Regarding this energy programme, Strougal noted that the total savings envisaged would not be possible immediately, but that substantial progress "must be registered in the remaining years of the current Five Year Plan, and especially in the next Five Year Plan". In his main speech the Prime Minister did not, of course, make any reference to the accidents which the Charter 77 movement allege took place at the Jaslovské Bohunice nuclear power station in January 1976 and February 1977.

It was left to a relatively minor member of the Assembly, Deputy Dana Kancirova, to raise this inauspicious subject. Even she approached it in a roundabout manner, asking for an explanation concerning the current Austrian press campaign about the safety of nuclear power stations. Mr Strougal answered, somewhat airily, that "our present and planned nuclear power stations are of the Voronezh type, different from the one at Zwentendorf" (The alleged fatal accidents at Jaslovské Bohunice, he added, were simply "a fabrication of bourgeois propaganda". Vera Rich

Islamic scientists prepare for UNCSTD

Ziauddin Sardar discusses the Muslim countries' views on development and the role of Islamic science

THE Islamic Secretariat is to submit a position paper, representing the views of its 42 member countries to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development in Vienna next August. The paper is the final outcome of a conference held in Jeddah on 17-21 March and has at least two novel features: it is the first effort by the Islamic bloc to represent an Islamic viewpoint on science and technology at the level of the United Nations and it forces the Muslim countries to recognise that there can be no effective development without the evolution of indigenous science and technology.

Implicit in the first point is the assumption that there is an Islamic alternative to the conventional practice of science and technology. That the Jeddah conference could not go beyond vague statements of this alternative is not surprising: the Muslim civilisation has been dormant for over three hundred years and current ideas on Islamic

science and Muslim technology emerged only at the turn of the decade. Clearly there is a great deal of work and much analysis to be done before anything concrete emerges. The Islamic Secretariat paper provides recognition to these ideas and should give them an international hearing.

The second feature is important because, when the paper is endorsed by the Tenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in May, the Muslim countries will become actively committed to the establishment of ministries and/or other high-powered bodies for science and technology. This may not appear to be much of an achievement from the perspective of the industrialised countries, but only half a dozen of the 45-odd Muslim countries currently have ministries and other national bodies devoted entirely to science and technology.

Billed as "The First Muslim Science Conference", the Jeddah meeting was convened by the Ninth Islamic Confer-



Emblem of the Islamic secretariat

ence of Foreign Ministers, held in April 1978. The science conference itself was a shambles. Of the thirty-odd delegates who attended only seven could be classified as scientists; the rest were all career diplomats. Although it was never openly admitted, the dominant presence of the civil servants was clearly embarrassing to the scientists who were eager to produce a powerful position paper.

What is surprising is that the scientists managed to carry the conference and produce a coherent and