

news in brief

Pillinger wins appeal against dismissal: A UK employment appeals tribunal has ruled that Dr David Pillinger was unfairly dismissed from his post as a research biochemist at the Christie Hospital in Withington near Manchester. Pillinger, 40, had held a permanent post at the Christie since 1962 but was made redundant when the Medical Research Council failed to fund an experimental chemotherapy project he was working on (28 January). A previous tribunal ruled against Pillinger but on appeal Mr Justice Flynne found that the redundancy was "grossly unfair" since the hospital did not make an effort to find out why Pillinger's grant was denied. The hospital will now apply to the Court of Appeal for leave to appeal and if this is granted it will present its case to the Court later in the year. In the meantime Pillinger is without compensation. Even if the Court of Appeal finds in his favour he will have to face a further tribunal to obtain remuneration for the damages caused by his dismissal.

Two hundred demonstrate for Piperno in Paris: Demonstrators marched through Paris last week in support of Franco Piperno, the Italian physicist and left-wing political activist who is threatened with extradition to Italy for "activities directed against the State". Piperno has drawn support from intellectuals in both France and Italy against his extradition. In Paris, the Comité des Intellectuels pour l'Europe des Libertés (CIEL) — an organisation of leading European intellectuals headed by playwright Eugene Ionesco — issued a statement last Thursday opposing a renewed demand for Piperno's extradition by the Italian authorities. "The rules of jurisprudence are opposed to an extradition based on manifestly political motives. The Paris court refused this extradition the first time and the Italian judge, seeing the inanity of his first formulation has prepared a second dossier consisting of an improbable judicial patchwork of no less than 46 indictments." In Italy, 50 Italian intellectuals, including writer Romaine Gary and film director Bernardo Bertolucci have expressed their opposition to the arrest of Piperno in Paris and the persecution of other activists in the Workers Autonomy Movement, an independent political grouping to the left of the Italian Communist Party. The Paris Court of Appeal will examine the second extradition request on 26 September.

Canada announces inquiry into nuclear energy: The Canadian Minister for energy, mines and resources, Mr Ray Hnatyshyn, announced last week that the Canadian government is planning an open parliamentary inquiry into "the whole field of nuclear energy". In a speech to provincial mines ministers in Winnipeg, he said that the inquiry will be conducted by a parliamentary committee, but that the government did not intend to place any type of moratorium on the further development of nuclear power during the inquiry. Full details of the nature and scope of the inquiry are to be decided after the Canadian parliament reconvenes in October.

French unions find fault with reactor part: Two French trade union federations, the CFDT representing metallurgy workers and the CGT representing workers in the energy industries, have announced "important" faults in the fabrication of a part destined for French nuclear reactor assemblies. The two federations made their announcement in a letter to the Minister for Industry, M. Andre Giraud, on 22 September. An official inquiry has been ordered into the origin and evolution of the fault. The fault in question consists of fissures from 7 to 8 millimetres long and 6 millimetres deep in the tubular plates of the heat exchanger-steam generator, one face of which has contact with the water from the primary reactor cooling circuit. The CFDT says that with some 20 reactors affected, French on-site safety measures are not adequate to deal with the situation. The CGT while saying that there is no immediate hazard is calling upon its

members not to start up the reactors without "fully guaranteed security conditions." A decision will be made at the end of the month whether to start up certain reactors or not.

US nuclear fuel factory shut down: The director of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's safety division has ordered the shut-down of a factory that manufactures fuel for US Navy nuclear submarines. The factory was closed after an NRC inventory revealed that a significant amount of highly enriched uranium was unaccounted for. The exact amount has not been disclosed but regulations stipulate a shutdown within 72 hours if more than 19.8 pounds of uranium is missing. The Nuclear Fuels Services Inc. facility which is located in Erwin, Tennessee has had a history of problems. In April 1977, the factory was fined \$53,000 by the NRC for failure to provide adequate security services. The facility will remain closed for 45 days while a complete uranium inventory is made.

US Navy tested germ warfare on San Francisco: The US Navy blanketed 117 square miles of San Francisco with an aerosol spray of bacteria in 1950 in an attempt to measure the effects of biological warfare, according to recently released military records. For six days in September 1950, a Navy ship released an aerosol containing *Serratia* sp. bacterial (thought to be harmless at the time) over the city. In spite of a subsequent outbreak of *Serratia*-related pneumonia the Navy kept quiet about the tests until last week when documents were released to the family of Edward Nevins, a victim who died during the outbreak. The family is suing the Army for \$11 million. The Nevins case raises questions about 239 similar open-air experiments conducted by the Army in the twenty years between 1949 and 1969.

Telecommunications for Third World: The use of new technology to provide reliable telecommunications for remote rural areas in Third World countries was one of the few practical suggestions to be made at the recent UNCSTD meeting in Vienna. Already worked out in considerable detail and coordinated by the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, the proposed Global Domestic Satellite System aims to make use of the increasing reliability and convenience of geostationary satellites (types such as INTELSAT 5 and SYCOM 4 were referred to in the paper) as the central transmission facility. Such a satellite would transmit to transistorised ground stations operable on a 12-volt battery pack costing an estimated \$ US 15,000. Retransmission would be by line of sight radio to the surrounding area. ITU believe that the rapid growth and refinement of the technology involved indicates the feasibility of launchings in 1982/3.

India to train Vietnamese scientists: India will train scientists from Socialist Republic of Vietnam under a programme of science and technology co-operation signed in New Delhi in July. The training will be in survey techniques, railway technology, information sciences, water resource management and research in drugs and medicinal plants. Areas of further co-operation between the two countries, in the fields of water management, pollution control, highway engineering research, traditional herbal remedies and medicinal plants will be explored by Indian scientists who will be sent to Vietnam. The programme is follow-up action of an agreement on cooperation between the two countries signed in Vietnam earlier. *Zaka Imam, New Delhi.*

Thai researchers go for mushrooms, not poppies: The Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research, Bangkok, has been investigating the cultivation of the button mushroom on paddy straw, one of the major agricultural wastes of the country. It is hoped that it will be suitable for cultivation by the poor hill tribes of North Thailand — where the opium poppy presently provides much income.