

news in brief

US waives air pollution rule for coal-burning power plant: The US Environmental Protection Agency announced last week that it would temporarily waive air pollution rules to allow New England's largest power plant — in Somerset, Massachusetts — to convert from oil to coal two years earlier than planned. The utility had been ordered to convert to coal in 1977 by the Federal Energy Administration, and although the EPA had agreed to the conversion, the need to install pollution-control equipment meant that the conversion was initially planned to be phased in between 1982 and 1984. However the EPA has agreed to a temporary waiver of the pollution rule covering particulate emissions.

Converting most power plants to coal is a key element of the Carter Administration's energy programme, and EPA deputy administrator Barbara Blum said that the waiver, which will not involve the violation of atmospheric air quality standards protecting public health, was an "important milestone" towards energy independence.

British Council of Churches urges abolition of UK nuclear missiles: By a vote of 54-19, the semi-annual Assembly of the British Council of Churches has urged the UK government to abandon its plans to replace Polaris submarine missiles with newer nuclear missile systems. The Assembly resolved that "non-replacement by the UK of its present nuclear strategic deterrent (the Polaris missile system) would strengthen moves for nuclear non-proliferation and urges Her Majesty's government to take a decision to this effect."

In its presentation of the resolution, the Council's Division of International Affairs, argued that "unfavourable consequences" could be minimised by careful implementation of the decision and that there is "no hope of reversing the nuclear arms race until a nuclear weapons state is willing to demonstrate that the arms spiral can go down as well as up. Britain now has a unique opportunity to demonstrate that nuclear non-proliferation is a realistic rather than Utopian goal." At present the UK has four nuclear submarines each armed with 16 missiles which were obtained "at rather advantageous prices" from the US in 1962. Each missile contains three UK manufactured warheads. The US now has 2,141 missiles capable of delivering 11,000 warheads and the Soviet Union has 2,582 missiles with about 5000 warheads.

Jacob criticises new social darwinists: French Nobel Laureate François Jacob has vigorously attacked the "ideological distortions" of biology propagated by social darwinists, racists and others in an attempt to "justify certain models of society". M Jacob is a coauthor of a recent report for the French government on bioengineering and has written a major five part series on biology for the French daily *Le Monde*. In these articles he takes severely to task those who, like the French "new right" or certain sociobiologists, would see in genetic diversity a racial weakness or an excuse to justify inequality and injustice. Indeed, says Jacob, human potential depends on this diversity. "Any effort that aims at the homogenization of the biological properties of individuals — either by hoping to 'ameliorate' them through eugenics or by seeking to encourage one attribute like an aptitude for mathematics or for running — would be biologically suicidal and socially absurd".

Refusnik charged with plagiarism: Dr Vladimir Kislik, a leading figure among Soviet Jewish "refusnik" scientists has been threatened with a charge of plagiarism and breach of copyright. Dr Kislik, whose work has been largely in radiation physics, especially radiation defects in solids, applied for an immigration visa for Israel, in 1973. Permission was refused, on the grounds that radiation physics was "secret", and he was obliged to leave his post at the Kiev Physics Institute. Since then he has worked as a nightwatchman, and as bus-ticket seller, and has been subject to

constant police surveillance. Deprived of any way of continuing his scientific career at home, he managed to send abroad a paper on the kinetics of helium release from irradiated samples of austenite steels, which was published in the *Journal of Nuclear Materials* in 1978.

Recently Dr Kislik was warned that a charge is being prepared against him under article 136 of the Ukrainian penal code which deals with plagiarism and patent infringements. This appears to be in connection with a thermokinetic method of He analysis which he developed while at the Kiev Physics Institute, and with the unauthorised publication of his paper abroad.

This is the first time that the smear of plagiarism has been raised against any refusnik scientist, and appears to form part of a new "pre-Olympic" drive against all forms of dissent and nonconformity. Ironically, Kislik himself could have a strong case against the authorities under the said Article 136. As with Academician Veniamin Levich, after being driven out of academic life, Kislik's name "disappeared" from citation of his published papers.

India's wild life projects

under spy cloud: Many of the wild life projects which India is currently carrying out in collaboration with western countries have come under suspicion of being convenient covers for espionage in the far-flung, strategic borderland of India. The Public Accounts Committee of



"All the beat produced was three KGB, one MIS and a brace of CIA!"

Parliament, after investigating various collaborative wild life schemes in India, has implied that a project on migratory birds is involved with the perfecting of biological weapons. The US is the guilty partner in this case and the work undertaken in the swampy, sprawling Sunderban, known for its variety of migratory birds, has come under severe public criticism.

Another project that has become a focal-point of public controversy is the "pheasant project" undertaken in collaboration with the International World Pheasant Association of the UK. It involves the selective reintroduction of pheasant in the foothills of the Himalayas in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. It is feared that the foreign collaborators might use the pheasant project as a camouflage for spying in the sensitive borderland.

B Radhakrishna Rao

Four thousand in French protest march: One of the largest demonstrations by scientific and technical researchers in the last ten years marched through Paris on 22 November. Responding to a national call from all the trade unions in the scientific sector to demonstrate opposition to the government's reorganisation plan for the CNRS, scientists and workers from this organisation were joined by colleagues representing the medical, agricultural and overseas research institutions of France in a march from the Sorbonne to the Presidential palace. A delegation handed in a protest against a government reform they feel was pushed through without consultation and which will lead to a dismantlement of French research, overdependency on the criterion of profitability and an increasing level of job insecurity for the country's scientists.

Correction: In "UK to tighten asbestos control", (1 November, page 5) crocidolite should replace chrysotile in the second paragraph of the second column. The first sentence of the fourth paragraph in that column should refer to the 0.5 fibre per ml⁻¹ limit for amosite.