

margin drilling "should be given high priority consideration for approval" in the NSF's 1981 budget.

The report also supported moves to gain support from private corporations in the US. This strategy has been actively canvassed by the Office of Science and Technology Policy, which Dr Press directs. And although corporate involvement had been objected to by some scientists on the grounds that it could steer the project away from basic research priorities, it soon became clear that the financial climate would not support the project on federal funds alone.

Last autumn both Dr Press and Dr Richard Atkinson, Director of the NSF, spent considerable time and effort talking to the heads of major US oil companies soliciting their support. The reactions were generally favourable, and in response to a formal approach, a number have now agreed in principle to help match the federal funding.

Negotiations have at times been delicate, given in particular the price sector's traditional reluctance to cooperate directly with the federal government, rather than on a contract basis. And various measures have been discussed to make the deal more attractive.

For example, it is expected that companies will not, at this stage, be required to commit themselves for the full ten years, but will have the option of pulling out after one year or after five years. It is also likely that the first location chosen for investigation will be off the North Atlantic coast of the US, an area of interest to the petroleum companies.

Details of how the scientific programme will be organised are also under discussion.

One likely arrangement is that the scientific efforts will be coordinated by the Joint Oceanographic Institutions Inc, a consortium of nine institutions involved in oceanographic research. There would also be three policy review boards, one established by the National Academy of Sciences, one by the Department of Defense, and one by various private institutions and corporations.

Total funding request for the next financial year is expected to be about \$20 million, half coming from the NSF — whose total deep-sea drilling budget would increase from \$18 million to about \$32 million, and half from the oil companies.

So far, despite some reservations about the corporate involvement, the reaction of most geologists to the scientific opportunities has been enthusiastic. Congressional reaction, however, has been more mixed.

Representative Edward Boland, for example, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee responsible for the NSF budget, has already written to President Carter urging full support for the project. But others are more sceptical, one congressional staff member pointing out that the cost per hole will be at least an order of magnitude greater than with the Challenger.

But the administration is convinced that it is sufficiently important to merit substantial support. "This will be an important scientific venture with possible implications for future resource discovery" said Dr Press. "We believe it is also a good example of government-industry cooperation, the kind of cooperation that we must see more of, in more fields, in the coming years". □

Laser fusion project to be halted?

PRESIDENT Carter is expected to recommend to Congress next week a halt to construction work on the \$200 million Nova laser fusion project, which began last year at the University of California's Lawrence Livermore Laboratory as a successor to the Shiva system first operated in 1978.

Administration officials in Washington confirmed last week a story appearing in the *Washington Post* which claimed that the Office of Management and Budget had recommended that funding for Nova be dropped from the President's budget request for the fiscal year 1981.

The agency is said to have been concerned partly about the cost of the project, and partly about growing uncertainties about whether glass laser technology can meet the efficiency of a commercially viable source of power.

Congress authorised \$23 million for Nova in 1979 — and a further \$56 million for 1980. The foundations for the new machine are currently being laid near Shiva.

A number of recent reports, however, have indicated that the project should be slowed until more is known of the physics of laser/pellet interaction, and of the engineering problems involved.

Officials at Lawrence Livermore are making no public comment until the final budget is published next week. But if funding for Nova is dropped, this is likely to be firmly resisted by the armed services committees in both houses of Congress, which support laser fusion research on account of its potential military applications.

Soviet Union

Science planners and the Press tackle the 'two cultures'

SOVIET science planners have taken up the "two cultures" controversy of CP Snow. A new Press "discussion", launched last week by the prestigious *Literatunaya Gazeta* will deal with the falling popularity of the applied sciences and its possible effect on the Soviet economy.

The new campaign, which will include expert articles and readers comments, is entitled "Applied science; prestige and people". It is intended to look into the factors hindering the implementation in production practice of new scientific results. This is not a new theme — the slow rate of implementation of R&D into industry has for some years been a recurrent complaint of planners and Party leaders alike.

Recently, however, the problem has been seen in a somewhat wider context. In December 1979, Moscow radio put out a Press-round up on the dirft of Soviet

school-leavers away from science. Instead of the "infatuation" with science and technology, which had characterised university applications for the past two decades, there was now, said the commentator, a significant increase in applications for medicine, economics and teacher-training and journalism courses. So long as this drift from science reflected a genuine response of young people to "spiritual values", he concluded, it was, on the whole, a good thing.

Literatunaya Gazeta, however, is less approving of the drift. In the course of creating of a scientific society, it observes, a "certain stereotype mode of thinking" has grown up, which considers that "applied research in the interests of this or that branch" is "second-rank and non-prestigious". The two opening articles of this discussion set out to contradict this assumption. The first, by A Savelev, a

sector-chief of the Central Scientific Research Institute of the Sewing Industry, cites C P Snow to the effect that many "pure" scientists fail to grasp the fact that many engineering problems are in no way inferior as regards explicitness and strictness to those with which they (the scientists) are concerned. And Boris Smagin, a leading science writer says that many Soviet scientists including Vernadskii, Bardin and Kurchatov "always placed the interests of science on the same level as the interests of the national economy".

The problem of prestige, however, is, as Smagin admits, a "mysterious" one. More precisely, in the words of an editorial footnote, the "prestige of the profession of applied-scientist is a social-psychological concept." The Press discussion of the role of prestige, explain the editors, is intended to focus attention on this. **Vera Rich**