Japan would also consider collaborating with the United States on FED although it is a little early for formal approaches to have been made. Professor Husini, a Japanese representative on the IAEA's International Fusion Research Council, said last week that Japan would be "very interested" in such a joint venture, on the basis of sharing costs.

This leaves the European Community in the cold beyond JET, unless it also joins in FED, which is by no means out of the question. The European Commission has been considering the next European Torus (NET) in a small committee headed by the Italian physicist Professor R Toschi of Frascati; but, said one Italian, "the FED recommendation means NET will have to be completely rethought. Perhaps we can build a device a step beyond FED and five years later."

The USSR would clearly be disappointed if INTOR goes little further than the project definition, which is to be presented to the IAEA next year. "The West has the bigger energy problem" said Golubchikov. The Soviet authorities are thus less bullish about fusion. It would thus assist the Soviet fusion community greatly if the next steps could be international. And Golubchikov believes the technical problems that will face FED or INTOR will be so great that Soviet participation will be necessary if there is to be rapid progress. After all, the USSR invented the tokamak — which appears to be the only viable ignition device at present — and built the only working superconducting tokamak (T7).

Robert Walgate

Laboratory merger Harwell again

Several large research facilities in Britain will be completed late, and Britain's capacity to contribute to new international projects will be impaired, as a result of pressures on the budget of the Science Research Council. This is the view of Sir Geoffrey Allen, chairman of the SRC, speaking at an Open Day at the newly-merged Rutherford and Appleton Laboratories last week. Although the science budget has been let off relatively lightly in recent public expenditure cuts, he said, a 10–15 per cent increase of the budget would be needed to complete existing projects within the original timetables and to start new ventures.

One victim of these enforced delays is the Spallation Neutron Source, at present under construction at Chilton, across the fence from Harwell. It will now be completed in 1984, two years later than originally planned, largely because it has been necessary to spread out the funding of the £12 million project. Allen is also concerned that Britain may not be able to contribute fully to the building of a new European synchrotron radiation source (*Nature*, 20 May) or to the European Space Agency's plan to build an astrometry

satellite, Hipparcos.

The proposed European synchrotron radiation project, devised by the European Science Foundation, would require a new international agreement among the partners; Allen plainly fears that the SRC budget may be too tight to allow Britain to contribute. Hipparcos presents a different problem. It will be paid for out of ESA's mandatory science budget to which all member states, including Britain, contribute annually on the basis of GNP. Allen's

concern here is that British laboratories should recapture some of the cost by making viable bids for the ESA contracts.

The merging Appleton and Rutherford Laboratories are hoping to overcome this manpower problem by training and re-deploying people as their projects come to an end, or as timetables are extended. The laboratories claim some success in these directions, but acknowledge that there must be limits to the extent to which staffs with different, highly specialised backgrounds, for example in radio and space physics (Appleton) and high-energy physics (Rutherford), can be fully redeployed.

A major reason for the merger is to save costs, including some staff. The SRC hopes to shed about 40 administrative jobs by not replacing those who choose not to move to the new site. Most of the scientific staff are expected to move, however, and those who do not will be replaced. So far about a third of the 300 Appleton staff have moved. The rest will do so before the end of 1981.

The plan to close the site of the Appleton laboratory at Ditton Park cannot be implemented precisely as originally hoped, however. Some of its instruments will not be compatible with the Chilton site; some millimetre wave and radio equipment, for example, will be sited 60 miles away to avoid interference from the spallation neutron source and 70 MeV linac.

Judy Redfearn

Siberian science

Marchuk on top

Last month's meeting of the Supreme Soviet confirmed the appointment of Academician Guri I Marchuk as head of the State Committee for Science and Technology. The confirmation was a formality; Marchuk's appointment took effect last January, when the then head, Academician Vladimir A Kirillin, resigned (coincidentally on the day that Academician Andrei Sakharov was exiled to Gor'kii).

Marchuk came to the State Committee from the Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences, of which he had been chairman since 1975. That branch, based on the science centre of Akademgorodok outside Novosibirsk, was originally set up, in 1957, as part of Khrushchev's overall plan to decentralize the economy. Its activities have always, therefore, been closely related, at least formally, to the needs of Siberia.

The Siberian branch would therefore share the blame if science failed to play a full part in the opening up of the Siberian heartland. In the autumn of 1976, criticism of the Siberian branch did in fact break out. The State Monitoring Committee at the outset criticized the Academy of Science's Far Eastern Science Centre for failing to make a proper practical contribution to the national economy. The campaign turned to more and more prestigious institutions, finally attacking the Siberian branch itself. At that point, Marchuk fought back, and with an impressive battery of arguments demonstrated that, so far from slacking, the branch was alive and flourishing and more than pulling its weight.

In his new job as head of the State Committee, Marchuk is responsible for the whole of Soviet science planning, the coordination of research and development and the subsequent implementation of research. Marchuk's Siberian experience will be invaluable, for Siberia remains the major area of Soviet capital investment.

Last April, a special conference of the Central Committee of the CPSU advocated increased investment in the fossil-fuel-bearing regions of West Siberia, apparently because a lack of amenities is making it hard to attract scientists and engineers to the area. The new Baikal-Amur Mainline railway was planned from the beginning as a joint exercise in engineering, ecology, demography and economics.

Plans to divert the major Siberian rivers south were, however, delayed during the last five-year plan, although, in response to complaints at the possible global environmental consequences, the Soviet government announced that no such changes would occur. It has however mounted a major environmental study of the region, with the result that Siberian

environmentalists have had unparalleled opportunity for field work in the past decade. This has involved the photography of the area from manned and unmanned spacecraft, ground-level geophysical surveys (which on one occasion discovered glaciers far to the south of where they were expected) and the drawing up of ecological guidelines for the engineers. There must be no tree-felling on slopes of more than 15

degrees and no insecticides — construction gangs plagued by the ubiquitous Siberian mosquitoes must use protective netting or swatters.

In spite of all this care, a recent report from the Chita Hydrometeorological Observatory suggests that the development of the BAM zone is running into environmental problems. In the north Transbaikalian area, it appears, there is very little wind; the

air masses remain static for a considerable time and industrial emissions become concentrated. Long before the BAM railway itself is officially opened, the pollution in the Chara valley is already, say the Chita scientists, some 50-100 per cent greater than that in the European part of the USSR — the centre, at present, of Soviet industry.

Vera Rich

CORRESPONDENCE

Biko's doctors

SIR, — The Faculty of Medicine of the University of the Witwatersrand has strongly attacked the decision of the South African Medical and Dental Council that there was no evidence of improper or disgraceful conduct on the part of the doctors who treated Mr Steve Biko before his death in detention. The Faculty Board has resolved unanimously to dissociate itself publicly from the council's decision, taken at a closed meeting on 17 June 1980.

At a meeting held on Friday, 27 June, the Board of the Witwatersrand University Medical Faculty unanimously adopted a resolution on the "Biko doctors". The resolution reads: "The Faculty of Medicine of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, has considered the decision of the South African Medical and Dental Council, taken at a closed meeting on 17 June 1980, that there was no evidence of improper or disgraceful conduct on the part of the doctors who treated Mr Steve Biko before his death, and that there was thus no need for a disciplinary hearing."

"Bearing in mind the revelations under cross-examination at the inquest, and the fact that the magistrate presiding at Mr Biko's inquest had considered that the matter of the Biko doctors should be referred to the South African Medical and Dental Council, the Faculty expresses its deep concern and disquiet at the finding that there was no evidence of improper or disgraceful conduct and that the matter should be dropped. The faculty feels that there was *prima facie* evidence of improper or disgraceful conduct, which should have been subjected to the careful scrutiny of a Medical Council Disciplinary Committee hearing."

"The Faculty is of the opinion, furthermore, that this decision of the Medical Council may seriously affect the good standing of the South African medical profession both at home and abroad and, therefore, publicly dissociates itself from this decision."

Further, the Faculty endorses and supports the Guidelines for Medical Doctors concerning Detainees and Prisoners, adopted by the 29th World Medical Assembly of the World Medical Association in Tokyo in October, 1975, and known as the "Declaration of Tokyo". This states, *inter alia*, that a doctor must have complete clinical independence in deciding upon the care of a person for whom he or she is medically responsible (Article 5), and that a doctor shall in all circumstances be bound to alleviate the distress of his fellow men, and no motive — whether personal, collective or political — shall prevail against this higher purpose (Article 8).

"The Executive of the Board of the Faculty of Medicine is requested to ensure that the views of the Board are communicated widely to the public and to the medical community, both in South Africa and abroad."

In accepting this resolution, the Faculty stressed that "We are not saying that the doctors are guilty. We are saying that there is sufficient evidence for a Disciplinary

Committee enquiry to be instituted and that a decision should be taken about the behaviour of the doctors on the basis of a full, fair, impartial and thorough Disciplinary Committee hearing. The South African Medical and Dental Council is supposed to be the watch-dog of the ethics of our profession and they have been zealous — and some would suggest over-zealous — in the severity of the punishment that they have meted out, not only for major infringements but for what many would regard as minor infringements of the ethics of medical practice. Yet, in the present case, it is difficult to accept that the Medical and Dental Council has applied its collective mind to the problem of the Biko doctors in a purely objective and dispassionate way."

In moving the resolution, Professor Clive Rosendorff, Head of the Department of Physiology at the Medical School, made this statement:

"This is all a source of great embarrassment and distress to many doctors in South Africa who are proud of the high ethical standing of their profession, both within this country and abroad. I believe that we have a responsibility to indicate to the world that we disapprove of the decision of the Medical Council to drop the matter. We should like it to be known that we dissociate ourselves, as an institution and as a body of concerned citizens and doctors, from their decision. We do this because we feel that it is morally indefensible for a matter as important and serious as this to be dropped before it has reached the Disciplinary Committee stage. We do this because we feel that the ethical standards of our profession have been compromised; because as doctors we have a humane concern for our patients and their welfare; because we are worried about the possible effects of the decision of the Medical Council on the future treatment of prisoners and detainees by the authorities; and because we are worried about the repercussions of the Medical Council's decision abroad. Already there are signs of a campaign to cut ties with doctors from South Africa, both at international congress level and in the recognition of our degrees abroad."

"Countries with which we have most dealing and reciprocity agreements, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United States of America, Canada, have always been happy to accept the *bona fides* of the S.A. Medical and Dental Council. However, there are already indications that rethinking on this point has started. The British Medical Association Ethics Committee is to examine the Biko doctors decision of the S.A. Medical and Dental Council. In Geneva, the World Health Assembly has called on member countries to review their medical ties with South African doctors."

My Faculty believes that it is vitally important that we distance ourselves from the decision of the Council. As a group of concerned doctors and Medical School teachers, we are worried that the South African Medical and Dental Council might, by its decision, have called in question its own credibility as an objective and unbiased

guardian of the high standards of the medical profession in South Africa.

Yours faithfully,

PHILLIP V. TOBIAS

Dean, Medical School,
University of Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg, S.A.

Russian continues

SIR, — May I, as Head of the Department of Russian and Soviet Studies at the University of Lancaster, be allowed to comment briefly on Vera Rich's piece in the last issue of *Nature* (3 July). Her remarks concerning the diminishing provision for the study of Russian in Britain, in contrast to the proposed expansion in Finland, are entirely justified. Her statement, however, suggesting there has been an "overnight decision to close down the Russian Department of the University of Lancaster" is incorrect and seriously misleading.

As part of a broader policy document which purported to be a strategy for the 1980s, a small Vice-Chancellorial committee at Lancaster recently recommended the gradual phasing-out of five small academic departments, including Russian. The document was subjected to widespread and vociferous criticism throughout the University and was finally withdrawn at a meeting of the University Senate on 11 June.

The department, therefore, still exists and will continue to exist — with an increased undergraduate enrolment in 1980-81. Moreover, in addition to its full degree programme of Russian history, politics, language and literary studies, and in the context of your article, it plans to mount a new elementary Russian language course which will be available for scientists who wish to acquire a reading knowledge of Russian and hence gain access to a major "medium of scientific communication".

Yours faithfully,

ALAN WOOD

University of Lancaster, UK

Dioxin disclaimer

SIR, — I wonder if you would be kind enough to allow me to comment on Alastair Hay's article in *Nature* (6 March) which indirectly implies that I had some part in the non-publication of the two investigations of Coalite workers.

Firstly I was never involved in the treatment of Coalite cases. Secondly, not only did I never suggest suppression of the data, but I repeatedly urged its publication — unsuccessfully.

It should be mentioned that the second and more far-reaching study to which Hay has referred was suggested to Coalite by the HSE since the first study was considered inadequate. I have never been shown the results of this second study by the company but obtained them by unofficial means.

Yours faithfully,

K.D. CROW

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