CDC officials claim they would do.

The question that remains is how this would affect the future of RAC. One option might be to open the committee up into a general "biosafety advisory committee", a proposal already supported by several committee members. Another would be to broaden its scope to consider some of the ethical issues raised by the use of genetic engineering techniques in medical experimentation — a direction which Dr Fredrickson is said to favour. Next month's meeting will provide some clues.

David Dickson

UK research councils

Spending too soon

Sir Geoffrey Allen, chairman of the Science Research Council, was let off lightly by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee last week. The committee had hauled him in to explain why the council had overspent in the year 1979–80 by £4.1 million. Mr Joel Barnett, chairman of the committee, reprimanded Sir Geoffrey for errors of judgement, but seemed to accept his explanation.

The trouble began, said Sir Geoffrey, with the council underspending its budget

No Tower for Allen

by £2 million in each of the previous two years and with the promise in late 1978 from Mrs Shirley Williams, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, of an extra £33 million for the years 1979–80 to 1982–83. To make sure that unspent money would not be taken back, Sir Geoffrey decided to spend the extra allocation for 1979–80 quickly and asked universities to apply for research and equipment grants. But by July 1979 it was beginning to be apparent that the council might be overcommitting funds, especially as the new Conservative government, elected the previous April, had said that it would not honour Mrs Williams's promise in full.

By September things had got worse. The council then knew that it would only receive £5 million of the £7.5 million it had been expecting for 1979–80. An attempt to withdraw some of the extra grants awarded

was unsuccessful because equipment had already been delivered and money spent. By October, the council was forecasting excess expenditure of £7 million by the end of the financial year. In the event, it managed to save £2.9 million, mainly on international subscriptions.

The council had been caught out because equipment manufacturers were able to deliver on time and because universities, with cash flow problems of their own, submitted bills promptly. Work on the spallation neutron source at the Daresbury laboratory had also been completed earlier than expected — the council had been hoping that the bills would fall in the succeeding year.

Mr Barnett suggested that Sir Geoffrey's stratagem to ease cash flow by postponing payments amounted to deception of Parliament. But officials from the Department of Education and Science and the Treasury were more sympathetic in their evidence. The problem is that the council, like other government-funded bodies, has to plan its annual expenditure within a very small margin of error. Sir Geoffrey's request that the error be raised from less than 0.2 per cent to 1 per cent, however, was quashed by the Treasury witness who said that an announcement had been made the previous day that no easing of cost margins was to be granted for any public agency.

The council's overspending for last year is bound to make this year's financial problems even more delicate, especially with the Public Accounts Committee breathing down the council's back. In the meantime, Sir Geoffrey expects to be issued with a formal reprimand. He is unlikely to be sent to the Tower of London.

Judy Redfearn

Polish academics

Degrees in question

Edward Gierek, former First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, made a comeback to public life recently — fighting to defend his right to an MSc. In an interview published in the Katowice Party daily, *Trybuna Robotnicza*, Mr Gierek complained that he had been subject to a prolonged campaign of denigration.

Mr Gierek was referring to allegations made by the Krakow Party daily *Gazeta Krakowska*, that the Krakow Akademia Gorniczo-Hutnicza (Mining and Metallurgy Academy — AGH) had improperly awarded scientific degrees to prominent political figures including Zdzislaw Grudzien (former Katowice Party chief), Franciszek Szlachcic and Stanislaw Kowalczyk (former Ministers of the Interior) and to Mr Gierek himself.

Meanwhile, the Solidarity chapter at AGH had published a list of people alleged to have gained degrees improperly, claiming that in the early post-war period special crammer courses were introduced in a number of technical specialities — but

that in practice only Party and government functionaries were able to take advantage of them.

Mr Gierek says that he was only one of several thousand people who had taken advantage of the courses intended to allow people with long industrial experience to get a degree in engineering "without regular studies".

The rector of AGH is Dr Roman Ney, who last autumn became a candidate member of the Party politburo. He was swift to respond to the suggestion of irregularities, and set up a special commission to investigate the allegations. In Gierek's case it found no evidence of malpractice. AGH had on file a copy of his diploma as a mining engineer, specializing in the exploitation of coal deposits, and duly approved by the examination board. Regarding the other allegations that in 1957–61 Grudzien, Szlachcic, Kowalczyk and others had been allowed to complete four-year extramural courses in the economics of metallurgy in just over one year, the AGH department of metallurgy simply reported that these particular courses had been established on the orders of the Minister of Education.

Further queries have been raised about the academic status of Andrzej Jaroszewicz (son of the former Prime Minister). On 9 March, Krakow Technical University set up a special commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding his external degree in engineering.

These swift responses to hints of irregularity are in sharp contrast to the attitudes of officialdom which led, in 1976 to the resignation of the then President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Janusz Groszkowski, from all his public offices. Professor Groszkowski had attempted to intervene in the case of Mrs Aleksandra Hankus, who in 1964 had complained to the Krakow Technical University that a Mr Tibor Petrys had stolen her scientific results. But the Technical University refused to take any action against Mr Petrys, granted him his DSc and later helped him prepare evidence for a libel suit against Mrs Hankus.

After an 11-year struggle — during which she served an 11-month sentence for libel and was sent by the judiciary for psychiatric tests — the Supreme Court finally vindicated Mrs Hankus, stating that she had proved that Petrys had "usurped her scientific work and cheated in obtaining the degree of Doctor of Sciences". When Professor Groszkowski tried to bring a legal action against Mr Petrys, the Procurator General blocked the case for a year, since, according to Professor Groszkowski, Mr Petrys still enjoyed the support of "some organs of justice". But eventually Mr Petrys' degree was revoked.

In September 1980 Professor Groszkowski at last re-entered public life with an open letter to the academy, calling for a return to true academic standards in Polish science.

Vera Rich