

# Congress stirs non-proliferation row

## Testimony on Iraq raid backfires

A serious row affecting the future of the Non-Proliferation Treaty has broken out between the United States government and the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. At issue is the appearance before two congressional committees in the past two weeks of a defector from the agency's safeguards inspectorate, Dr Roger Richter (33). At a meeting of the board of the agency in Vienna this week, Dr Sigvard Eklund, director-general of the agency, said that Dr Richter's evidence to the Senate and House committees on Foreign Relations (on 18 June and 1 July respectively) had involved the disclosure of confidential information in breach of his contract of employment, and that the agency was taking legal advice.

Dr Richter's appearances have been dramatic, to say the least. According to Dr Eklund's statement on Monday, Dr Richter last showed up for work in Vienna on 15 June. The following day, Senator Alan Cranston, chairman of the Senate committee on Foreign Relations, announced in Washington that Dr Richter, having resigned for the occasion, would be giving evidence three days later. Dr Richter's resignation was received by telex in Vienna on 18 June, according to Dr Eklund; it was not, however, accepted, but Dr Richter was instead fired.

Dr Eklund in his statement said that Dr Richter had worked for the agency since February 1978, and that he had been assigned to the section of the agency concerned with supervising safeguards in the "south and south-east" sections of the agency's territory, including both Iraq and Israel, in March 1979. Dr Richter's evidence to the congressional committees consisted most conspicuously of the assertion that the agency's safeguards were not adequate to detect violations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty by Iraq.

Dr Richter was dissuaded by Senator Cranston from quoting from a letter he had written a year ago to the US State Department, in which he had alleged that "the IAEA safeguards are totally incapable of detecting the production of plutonium in large scale materials-test reactors . . ." such as that destroyed by the Israeli raid on Tamuz on 7 June.

One of the reasons why the agency has taken umbrage is that neither house of Congress has taken its denials seriously. On Monday, Dr Eklund told his board that the authorities in Iraq had been approached immediately after the Israeli raid on Tamuz

and visited the site on 18 June. They were unable to visit the main reactor because of the extent to which it had been damaged (and the insistence of the Iraqi authorities on a personal accident indemnity). The associated research reactor and the stockpile of enriched uranium was however inspected and found in order.

For the agency, the incident obviously raises serious questions about the fiduciary responsibilities of its safeguards inspectors. One requirement of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is that information gathered by inspection teams should be kept confidential. The fact that a defecting inspector should have told all to Congress on the day of his formal resignation is a serious blow to the system.

In the United States, Dr Richter's evidence to the Senate and the House has had an equally profound effect, and may impede the Administration's declared intention of liberalizing restrictions (made necessary by the Carter Anti-Proliferation Act) on the export of nuclear technology. The nuclear industry has been especially critical of the act's requirements that

recipient nations, even those that had signed the treaty, should go further than merely accept the Vienna safeguards before becoming eligible.

Part of the reason why the Carter Act has been controversial among potential recipients of United States' nuclear technology is that one condition for their signature of the treaty, in the early 1970s, was the promise that nuclear powers would assist with the development of peaceful nuclear technology.

Opinion is divided in Washington about the strength of Dr Richter's testimony.

In Congress, however, Senator Charles Percy, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, says he has been shaken by Richter's evidence.

The chief casualty is likely to be the Administration's determination to reform the anti-proliferation policy it inherited in February. Even President Reagan startled the nuclear industry when he acknowledged at last week's press conference that signature of the Non-Proliferation Treaty did not necessarily imply compliance.

## British universities transformed by budget

A major reshaping of the British university system was decreed last week, when the University Grants Committee sent letters to each of the 51 universities in Britain giving details of their recurrent grants for the next three academic years. But the full implications of what the committee has decided will not be clear until the details have been analysed by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, to which the universities have separately (but in confidence) provided copies of the letters they have received from the committee.

Two features of the new pattern are however apparent. By the beginning of the academic year 1984-85, the total number of students from the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the European Community is to be no greater than 249,000, five per cent less than last year (the base year for all the committee's calculations) and 7.5 per cent less than in the current academic year. And the total recurrent grant for the universities, paid on the recommendation of the University Grants Committee, will fall from £972 million in the current year to £808 million in 1983-84.

As well as publishing a general statement of what it was about, the committee last week sent individual letters to universities including what is called "advice" about the teaching activities that should be continued (and sometimes strengthened) but also, in many cases, abandoned. Most recommendations of this kind, which only the bravest universities will ignore, concern the arts or social sciences. But some universities have also been "invited" to

abandon teaching their brand of biology.

The University Grants Committee (which has no formal mechanism for dealing with enquiries from the press) is not prepared to say how its decisions about individual universities have been arrived at. It seems, however, to have sought to preserve excellence and minority areas of study and to encourage what is known as "thrift" while maintaining regional balances. Unit costs appear to have been influential in the case of the University of Bath which, while boasting of a diversified programme of studies linked broadly (and sometimes loosely) with industry, also boasts of the lowest costs per student in Great Britain, and has been the most generously treated university of all — its income is cut by merely 7 per cent.

It is also known that the committee, in making specific recommendations to the Department of Education and Science for grants to individual universities, took advice about the performance of universities in competition for research grants from the research councils. One vice-chancellor, at least, is glad to think that his university's relative immunity from impending frugality stems from his academics' success in raising more than £3 million a year by way of grants.

Vice-chancellors at the newer technological universities most severely affected by the cuts complain, however, that in its calculations of external research support the grants committee has paid too little attention to research support provided by industrial companies as distinct from research councils. They also

point, with justifiable surprise, to the committee's formal endorsement (in its letter for general circulation) for courses of study intended to foster closer relationships between students and industry and the presence of at least three former colleges of advanced technology ("universities in waiting" in the early 1960s) among those now worst hit (Salford, Aston in Birmingham and Bradford).

The delivery of the committee's letters to universities comes at an awkward time, with the summer vacation almost everywhere begun. The committee has agreed that aggrieved universities should have a right of "consultation", which will, nevertheless, have to be exercised quickly. The committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals is hoping within the week to put together a document showing how the pattern of the university system will be changed, but even that calculation will be jeopardized by uncertainty about the recruitment of overseas students (who pay higher fees) in the next few years. Even moderately gloomy forecasts suggest that the total reduction of university income may be as much as 17 per cent when allowance is made for that deprivation.

## French universities

### New appointments

While Mrs Margaret Thatcher squeezes the British universities, the departure of another lady over the channel has French universities sighing with relief. Madam Saunier-Seïté, Minister of the Universities under President Giscard d'Estaing, set out to centralize power over appointments and the allocation of degrees, and to weaken the role of some of the smaller regional universities. Now, under a gentlemanly new minister of the new government, M. Alain Savary, that is being reversed.

M. Savary says he wants dialogue with the universities, and dialogue he seems bound to get. Within a few days of the election of President Mitterrand, 100 lecturers at the University of Paris signed a declaration condemning the previous minister's "scandalous" methods of making university appointments and demanding a more democratic approach. The two principal education unions, the Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur and the Syndicat Général de l'Education Nationale, also weighed in with a joint statement warning that conservative and technocratic forces were still in control of the universities, and that they would have to be overthrown.

The chief target seems to be the Conseil Supérieur des Corps Universitaires, which according to its timetable should meet this month to consider this year's new appointments to the few university posts available. The council, strengthened by Saunier-Seïté, interviews candidates and makes its decisions in private, without right of appeal, complain the Paris 100; moreover

its council is said to be predominantly conservative and to give a poor hearing to candidates offering a novel approach to teaching or unfamiliar combinations of subjects. Certainly, the council — as now constituted — is an obstacle to university autonomy, and M. Savary, while not referring to it directly, has said he wishes to restore university autonomy and to set up new decision-making methods which will be "very decentralized".

On another tack, Savary also seems set to restore some of the second and third-level degree courses whose status as such was removed by the previous minister. A partial list of approved courses for 1981–82 was released last week. It was determined almost entirely by assessment procedures set in train the previous year and, conscious of its shortcomings, M. Savary has announced that the universities are free to appeal against the decisions (where a course has been cancelled) or to make new proposals. But he has called for "a sense of self-discipline" among the professors: there is not to be a free-for-all in which every wild proposal will meet approval.

Savary also says that appeals may not last into next year. The device is a stop-gap measure. For the long term, M. Savary plans to enter "without delay" into discussions, with all who are interested, over new mechanisms for the accreditation of courses.

Robert Walgate

## US biomedical research

### Against the tide

#### Washington

Democrats in the House of Representatives have been having little success in trying to reverse budget cuts proposed by President Ronald Reagan, but they may gain a rare victory on the issue of support for biomedical research training.

Focus of the dispute is the National Research Service Awards (NRSA) scheme, which provides about 10,000 grants annually to support postgraduate and postdoctoral research workers. The Reagan Administration is proposing that such grants should no longer contain institutional support to cover general overheads at research institutions, which would mean a cut of more than 25 per cent in grant allocation. Medical schools and universities complain that without this support — about \$50 million a year — they will not be able to sustain an adequate base across all areas of research training.

The medical schools won a preliminary round earlier this year, when both houses of Congress rejected the Administration's proposal to drop institutional support provided through the awards scheme as a budget saving for the fiscal year 1981, which began last October.

Less expected was their success in the debate on the 1982 budget in the House. The defection of a number of conservative Democrats to the Senate side resulted in

defeat for proposals submitted by the House leadership, and victory for amendments presented by Republicans.

For example, the House Science and Technology Committee had proposed deleting funds for the construction of the liquid metal fast breeder reactor at Clinch River in Tennessee, transferring much of this money to research in solar energy and conservation. The full House, however, rejected this proposal, restoring the Clinch River funds and severely reducing the solar energy budget.

In biomedical research training, however, the cuts proposed for 1982 brought a stream of protests from the research community. In a letter to Representative John D. Dingell, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee which has responsibility for the budget of the National Institutes of Health, 58 separate medical and research associations warned that the cuts would be "severely harmful".

The lobbying seemed to pay off. Mr Dingell's committee recommended to the full House that the NRSA budget be raised to \$194 million from the proposed \$147.3 million.

The Republican-run Senate, however, has already passed a budget bill containing the lower figure proposed by Mr Reagan. In addition, the Senate suggests an upper limit on biomedical research supported by the National Institutes of Health of \$3.7 million, a move which the medical associations describe in their letter as "arbitrary, unprecedented and unnecessary."

Negotiations now have to take place between the House and the Senate before both sides can agree on a common bill. At the same time, there is a parallel debate going on over the budget for the Department of Health and Human Services which is responsible for the funding of the National Institutes of Health.

In particular a key Senate Committee — Labor and Human Resources — is in deadlock. The committee's previous chairman, Democrat Senator Edward Kennedy, backed by other Democrats and two Republicans, is proposing an additional \$50 million for research training awards. The current chairman, Republican Senator Orrin Hatch, is opposed to the committee taking a public stance in defiance of the President's recommendations; but he has promised that if the committee approves the lower figure, he will intervene to see if it can be raised.

Medical school lobbyists, such as the American Association of Medical Colleges, intend to keep up the pressure to have the funds restored. Dr Lamont-Havers of the Massachusetts General Hospital told a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that the proposed cuts reflected "a deep bias within the Office of Management and Budget" against the biomedical research training programme.

David Dickson