

politics of scientific employment" — which he must countersign.

Chevènement will also "be associated with" France's efforts in international scientific cooperation, in cooperation with the foreign minister M. Claude Cheysson.

The decree outlining Chevènement's powers has required negotiation at the highest possible level, and has been signed by President Mitterrand, Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, the foreign minister and ministers of industry and education.

The national colloquium on science and technology will now take place on 13–16 January 1982, and Chevènement is laying great emphasis on its role in defining a new politics of science in France, and the major "loi-programme" for science which he is to put before parliament next year. The colloquium is to have six principal sessions: on the cultural contribution of science and scientific responsibility; on the internal division of money for science (scientific and technical options, big science and so on); the role of science in helping France to climb out of the recession and create employment; the management of scientists (contracts of employment and so on); the role of other bodies influencing science (big industry, for example); and the political and structural means adopted by Chevènement himself. **Robert Walgate**

## No rapprochement

The usually covertly political nature of education in France came out into the open last week with the sacking of 14 of the 28 regional education officials.

These officials administer education from primary to university level within the "Académies", territories which encompass several of the French departments; ever since General de Gaulle revised their powers in 1967, they have become increasingly political figures. Madame Saunier Seité, Giscard d'Estaing's minister of universities, was previously head of an *Académie*; and others became junior ministers or ministerial advisers.

In effect, this was inevitable under de Gaulle's ordinance, which loosened their hold on power and so made them more reliant on the goodwill of the government. Now fourteen unlucky incumbents have been found to be tarred too heavily with the brush of the previous administration, and must go.

This will make room for a "profound reform", the minister of education, M. Alain Savary, said last week in a press statement. The new administrators must not make politics, he said; they must obey the politics of the government. Their predecessors, by contrast, had been active against the new government both before and after the election. Some had stood as candidates for opposition parties. The deposed director of the Paris *Académie*, for example, had been Saunier Seité's chief adviser. **Robert Walgate**

## Alternative energy conference Realism the theme

### Washington

At least five heads of state, including Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Mrs Indira Gandhi of India, will be among the participants at the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy (UNERG) which starts in Nairobi next Monday. Their presence, together with energy and other ministers of industrialized and developing nations, is held by the conference organizers to indicate a measure of success in getting across their view of the political importance of alternatives to oil, coal, gas and nuclear energy.

But political weight alone will not guarantee a successful conference. UNERG is likely to set a very different tone from the large UN conferences of the 1970s, when global issues such as environmental pollution and the "human habitat" were confronted in a spirit of optimistic idealism.

From the beginning, UNERG has been organized with a more pragmatic outlook. It was, for example, agreed by a narrow vote of the UN General Assembly that nuclear power would not be included on the "new energy technologies" agenda, a move supported by many industrialized nations which feared the result would be too difficult to handle, but opposed by developing nations on the grounds that its exclusion — together with any explicit reference to conventional energy sources — would inevitably skew any results. But perhaps the main stimulus for pragmatism is the general feeling that grandiose schemes for new international bodies (such as the UN Environmental Programme, set up after the Stockholm conference in 1972), or even for a commitment to significant increases in development aid funds, are unlikely to gain support in an international mood of austerity.

In such a context, the tangible achievements of the Nairobi meeting will inevitably be limited. But Secretary General Enrique Iglesias, seconded to direct conference preparations from his permanent position as head of the Economic Commission for Latin America, remains confident that it can still have a real impact by bestowing legitimacy on energy sources frequently omitted from development planning.

One of the most practical parts of the conference has already been completed — a series of technical reports on fourteen different types of new and renewable energy sources, from wind energy to draught animals. The quality of the reports is mixed; but some, such as that produced by an international panel on wind energy, have met with wide approval. And the preparation of national contributions for the conference is said to have catalysed thinking about alternative forms of energy

production and energy planning in general — particularly in some of the developing countries — that had previously been virtually non-existent.

How these will evolve into practical initiatives remains to be seen. Several industrialized countries are said to be keen to support the setting up of research and training institutes for the various energy sources, wood-fuel being the most frequently quoted example. And the Society for International Development is promoting the idea of an international network of energy research institutes along the lines of the agricultural research network run by the World Bank.

The political debate will inevitably focus on the two factors which tend to dominate all international meetings of this nature: money (development aid contributions, primarily from the industrialized nations), and power (the organization of the UN bureaucracy).

Initially the developed and developing nations will be less far apart than at the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) in Vienna in August 1979, where the Group of 77 arrived at the bargaining table with a proposal for a new fund to support Third World research with a budget of \$2,000 to \$4,000 million. This time the developing countries have accepted that such proposals are unrealistic. Any extra support for development of new energy technologies is therefore likely to come from changes in existing arrangements.

The conference organizers originally hoped that the meeting would coincide with the creation of a new "energy affiliate" by the World Bank, a proposal put forward by the bank's then President Robert McNamara last year as a device for raising capital for energy production schemes. So far, though, this has been vetoed by the Reagan Administration on the grounds that investment should, where possible, be left to the private sector.

With the World Bank's initiative stalled — and general agreement that the Nairobi conference should not try to set up a new energy fund — one of the most likely outcomes is an agreement that energy projects should receive a set proportion of the funds raised through a new "financing system" for science and technology, which has been in the planning stages since the Vienna meeting two years ago.

If approved in principle by the General Assembly later this year, the "financing system" would probably take over responsibility for projects at present financed through a two-year interim fund, also established at Vienna, operated by the UN Development Programme. The interim fund already supports several energy projects, such as research into the use of wind power in Mauritius and the introduction of more efficient wood-stoves into the Sahel region of Africa.

To a large extent, however, the most significant meetings will not take place in

Nairobi at all, but will be those surrounding the summit meeting planned for Mexico in October under the auspices of the Brandt Commission. This meeting, which will be attended by President Reagan, is expected to set the tone for negotiations between developed and developing nations for the first half of the 1980s; as a result, it will provide the setting within which any results from Nairobi will inevitably be judged.

David Dickson

## To the gulags

The last two members of the Moscow "Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes", Irina Grivnina and Feliks Serebrov, were last month tried and convicted on charges of anti-Soviet activity. Ms Grivnina was sentenced to five years' internal exile, Mr Serebrov to four years in a labour camp plus five years internal exile.

The "Working Commission" was established in 1977 as part of the general human rights monitoring movement in the Soviet Union, and its members made determined efforts to visit "patients" confined in psychiatric hospitals because of their political beliefs. The commission produced a *samizdat* (information bulletin) giving details of its findings, and where possible provided colleagues abroad, on a confidential basis, with case notes of the patients investigated. In most cases these notes showed that by non-Soviet standards there were no grounds for compulsory hospitalization.

For these activities commission members have either been forced to emigrate (like Dr Volshanivich) or arrested and charged with disseminating anti-Soviet slander (Article 190/1), or with anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation (Article 70/1). According to Soviet judicial theory, as reiterated recently by Evgenii Smolentsev, Deputy Chairman of the USSR Supreme Court, "in the practice of Soviet courts, there are not and there cannot be convictions for religious and political beliefs" and hence any claim that there are prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union is anti-Soviet propaganda.

According to TASS, Mr Serebrov pleaded guilty under Article 70/1 and admitted knowing that the documents he helped to prepare would be distributed in the West. TASS further recorded that he had "repented" of these actions, but some Moscow sources deny this "repentance", saying that in such a case a far lighter sentence would be expected.

The British Medical Association has tabled a motion for the September meeting of the World Medical Association in Lisbon, condemning both the use of psychiatric methods for political repression and the suppression of the "Moscow Working Commission".

Vera Rich

## UK engineering council

### New lambs for old

A new body to safeguard the quality of British engineers is to be set up by Royal Charter, the government announced last week. The Engineering Council, as the body will be known, is the culmination of eighteen months of heated debate since the Committee of Inquiry into the Engineering Profession, chaired by Sir Monty Finniston, recommended that there should be a new organization to oversee the education and registration of engineers.

The Engineering Council's first part-time, unpaid chairman is Sir Kenneth Corfield, chairman of Standard Telephones and Cables Limited. The Department of Industry, which is putting up £1 million to get the council started, will appoint 15-24 board members — for which it has already received 300 suggestions — and a permanent secretariat in the autumn. After a three-year transition period, the council will elect its own members and will be expected to be self-financing mainly from fees charged for registration, its chief business.



Corfield; engineering's chartered chief

The council is a disappointment to many. Some consider it a poor substitute for the statutory Engineering Authority that Sir Monty's committee had asked for. One issue in the debate has been the relationship between a new body and engineering institutions, especially the Council of Engineering Institutions, which have traditionally chartered engineers and promoted their separate interests through their own Royal Charters. Sir Monty and his supporters fear that the new Royal Charter gives the institutions too much influence. Certainly the new council will not have funds for the improvement of engineering education or even the support of students, as Finniston had asked.

The charter lays down two main roles for the council, each of which it is empowered to delegate in part to the engineering institutions: to determine standards and criteria for the education, training and experience of engineers and to keep a

register of those meeting the criteria. Engineers will be eligible to apply for three categories of registration; as professional engineers, technician engineers or engineering technicians. Registration for each category will be in three stages, the first after completing an approved course, the second after training and the third after work experience. Provision is also made for those entering the profession through unorthodox routes. And all those now registered through the Engineers' Registration Board of the Council of Engineering Institutions will automatically be registered with the new council at stage three.

The role of the Engineering Council as registering authority calls into question the future of the Council of Engineering Institutions (CEI). That body, however, expects to carry on with business as usual for perhaps two years until the new council is operating fully. Any change in its status will then mean revoking its own Royal Charter, a move which cannot be taken without a two-thirds majority among its members. The battle for responsibilities could continue much against the wishes of Sir Monty's committee and others who hoped to break the CEI's grip.

Judy Redfearn

## University Grants Committee

### Biting the bullet

The University Grants Committee considered earlier this year whether it should resign rather than administer the British government's 8.5 per cent cut in support for the universities, according to Dr Edward Parkes, the committee's chairman, in evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education. But, in the end, the committee decided to soldier on, not wishing to be a "fair-weather committee" and believing itself to be the only group with a sufficiently detailed knowledge of the British university system.

Some Members of Parliament were clearly disappointed that the committee had not given them the tangible weapon against the government that a mass resignation would have provided. The select committee was also chagrined that Dr Parkes declined to hand over copies of his correspondence with the Secretary of State for Education, Mr Mark Carlisle, in which — according to his evidence — he had warned the British government of too rapid a contraction of the university system.

Although Dr Parkes's evidence, like that of a delegation from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, was taken in private, a transcript of the proceedings was made public last week after the witnesses had confessed themselves puzzled that the hearing had been held in private. Perhaps the select committee had been hoping that its witnesses would have been more open, even gossipy.