

reputation of universities to put the interests of their students first. Individual universities may not be too hard-pressed to devise rules for regulating what happens in departments with an interest in biotechnology. The difficulty will be to ensure that these can be applied across the board.

Some thought should also be given to the question of why the commercialization of basic research has recently thrown up so many problems. Government support for basic research is shrinking everywhere, while universities are being urged to look to industry for sponsorship. Universities and individual academics are being driven into the arms of those companies farsighted enough to recognize that they have much to gain from partnerships like these. There is much to be said for finding ways of turning academic discoveries into prosperity for the wider community. But while some academics appear genuinely to be excited by the challenge of turning their bright ideas into business enterprises, others appear to be at least as much intrigued by the prospect of monetary rewards. Explanations, or excuses, are not hard to find. Compared with their students who make a success in industry, academics are scandalously paid, for example. But has the traditional loyalty of academics to the institutions which employ them been eroded? And if so, what will be the consequences of that? It is a fair guess that the university presidents who met at Pajaro Dunes two weeks ago would have been fully conscious of this disturbing thought.

## The Falkland War

*The British Government hopes that diplomacy will avoid a war with Argentina. How?*

The next few days are bound to have an air of unreality not merely for those who live and work in Britain or Argentina but for the rest of the world. A small British naval force is sailing to the South Atlantic with the intention of liberating the Falkland Islands from their occupation by an Argentinian force last weekend. The military task is formidable, for it is bound to be more difficult to dislodge an occupying force than it would have been to prevent it from landing in the first place. So too is the diplomatic task, for the government of Argentina has repeatedly declared its intention of staying put. Sensibly, however, the British government has promised to use the next few days for seeking some kind of solution. What might this be?

The facts are clear. There is no impartial body of opinion that disputes the illegality of what the Argentinian government has done. Moreover, the doctrine advanced in Buenos Aires that the Falkland Islands belong to Argentina because of their proximity is a dangerous doctrine, as the case of Ulster in Ireland shows. The Argentinian action in the Falkland Islands might have been seen in a different light if the 1,800 inhabitants of the islands had shown the slightest inclination to opt for Argentinian rather than British citizenship, and if Britain made no use of the territory (which serves as a staging post not merely for commercial vessels but for British Antarctic expeditions). In this sense, the British presence in the Falkland Islands is beyond reproach. The problem is to reconcile this with the apparently implacable conviction of the government of Argentina that the Falkland Islands belong to Argentina.

Sovereignty is a heady concept, for which people are all too willing to kill each other. In the weeks ahead, the governments of Britain and of Argentina will also know that their own survival may depend on how things turn out in the Falkland Islands. So should they not think of trying to reach a settlement of this wasteful conflict by more old-fashioned methods than the use of military technology. Specifically, should not Britain think of offering to sell the Falkland Islands to Argentina in much the way in which Alaska was traded by the Soviet Union to the United States? The price, of course, would be high. Not merely would the 1,800 people of the Falkland Islands have to be compensated, but the British government would have to be recompensed for the loss of the benefits it now enjoys from possession of this out-of-the-way place as well as for the benefits that may in the future accrue.

## Rewiring Britain

*The Government, after a decade of indifference, is now too quickly embracing cable television.*

As Paul on the road to Damascus, the British government has suddenly been converted to the belief that it will be socially beneficial if a substantial part of Britain can be covered with cable television systems. Two weeks ago (see *Nature* 25 March, p.282) the Department of Industry surprised most British taxpayers with an announcement that by the end of the year, it will have worked out a scheme that will allow commercial companies to invest in cable television systems. Between now and then, the government hopes, a committee under Sir John Hunt, one of the many ex-secretaries of the Cabinet still in active service, will have worked out a set of rules for regulating this business, new for Britain. No doubt the government has it in mind that many voters at the next general election will go more cheerfully to the polls if they are able to return to a wider choice of television signals than at present.

The directness of the government's change of heart is remarkable. For the past decade, the Home Office has allowed only a few local experiments with cable television. Part of its reluctance is explained by its wish not to encourage competition with the development of the national broadcast television service. Thus, in the autumn and after years of argument, a fourth channel of broadcast television will take the air financed by the revenues from commercial advertising. Hitherto, the government has listened to the pleas of the Independent Broadcasting Authority that the success of that enterprise should not be jeopardized by allowing advertisers competing outlets for their cash. That principle, it seems, has now been abandoned. At the same time, the present British government has plainly decided that it can no longer allow itself to be restrained by the squeamishness of the principal opposition party about pay-television. Subscribers to the proposed cable television networks will be able to watch on their screens whatever they can afford to pay for.

But what? This is where Sir John Hunt's committee will run into trouble. Working against the government's clock, the committee will be tempted to follow precedents established overseas, in the United States especially. It will thus be tempted to insist that any new cable system should distribute the four national television channels that are at present adequately served by conventional broadcasting. Even though some of the would-be operators of cable systems are likely to protest that such a requirement would be pointless, in the long run substantial benefits should accrue. The other obvious temptation will be to follow the common pattern in the United States which requires cable systems to provide one or more channels free to those local interests believing they have something to say to the public at large. That is a temptation to be resisted, for the experience of the United States has shown that people linked with cable systems vote with their tuning knobs to watch something else in preference. In the long run, the public interest will be best served by taking its chance with other interests.

The most contentious issue, however, will be that of how the content of signals put out on the new cable systems should be regulated, and by whom. There will be a temptation to set up some public body to ensure, for example, that nothing broadcast by the new cable systems can give offence to those who at present act as custodians of public morality. This, too, is a temptation that should be resisted. For the most obvious difference between cable systems and conventional broadcast channels is that the channel capacity of cable is much greater than that of the atmosphere. While it will remain important that the national television service should conform with rules that are understood and accepted, people linked with cable television should be allowed to receive whatever signals they wish — and which they are prepared to pay for. The danger here is that the potential operators of cable networks, anxious as they are to encourage the government in its new resolve, will meekly agree to censorship that will not afterwards be easily removed.