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Thus the events of the past few days have cast a pall over Western Europe. For the past several years, it has been customary (but not always easy) to say that the defects of the then-current foreign policy of the United States were the consequences of the division of responsibility between the White House and the State Department that seems at last to have been the indignity that Mr Haig could not stomach. Each time this recurrent crisis has come round, another tranche of transatlantic loyalists has been lost to doubt, but European governments have usually buckled to and have been able to hold the line. Always, in the past thirty years, transatlantic cultural cohesion has proved to be a powerful cement. And in any case there has been no alternative to United States hegemony. But now the wind is changing.

Private funds can matter

The legend that foundations are now too small to exert an influence has been shown to be false.

Private foundations have become financially so much smaller than public sources of research funds that it is customary to disregard them. For what, the argument tends to be, can foundations hope to accomplish with their meagre funds when the more immediate threat is to the survival of institutions, the annual running costs of which tend to outstrip the capital resources of foundations? Fortunately, that gloomy inference is not as valid as simple arithmetic would suggest. The lie is neatly given to this canard by the imaginative grant announced last week by the Wolfson Foundation to the two British centres for research in tropical diseases, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. The circumstances are worth remarking.

Both institutions are relics of the days of what the British used to call Empire, founded as they were to safeguard overseas servants of the Crown from unfamiliar infections by insect-borne parasites of various kinds. Almost by accident, they became places at which physicians, following the precept that prophylaxis is preferable to cure, sought to work out ways of dealing with tropical diseases at their source. Inevitably, they became prominent among the centres, mostly outside the tropics, at which an understanding of tropical diseases was cultivated and cherished. With the passage of time and the collapse of Empire (or colonialism), they have been increasingly supported by agencies concerned above all that physicians and paramedical people from the tropics should have a sufficient training in the diagnosis and treatment of these infections.

From here on, the tale is muddled. It happens (again by accident) that the London and Liverpool centres are parts of the British university system, and that the British government has recently decreed that new overseas students should pay such outrageous tuition fees that they cannot afford to be educated. So, earlier in this academic year, it seemed as if the tropical medicine schools in London and Liverpool would be in serious trouble, deprived of students and then robbed of funds with

which to pay members of their faculties.

The Wolfson grant to the two schools jointly will in the circumstances have a marvellous effect. At a cost of £3 million over five years ("chicken-feed" will say the public research councils) it should be possible to keep the core of each research faculty in being and to arrange that the research they do is at once more imaginative and more closely coordinated than in the past. There is talk of using genetic manipulation to make parasitic antigens, and of understanding the human genetics of susceptibility to parasitic infection. But the prospectus is open-ended. Plainly, it would have been impossible for any public research council to have made such a grant. Yet the chances are high that it will succeed, and that two distinguished centres of research will remain productive. If, anomalously, it should turn out that research in tropical medicine continues to be centred partly in developed countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, what harm will be done by that? Last month, the European Parliament gave the European Commission a hard time because it had proposed spending part of its meagre research budget earmarked for development in developed countries. The Commission has a longer purse than the Wolfson Foundation, but is less well advised.

Riding for a fall?

The French minister for science and technology may be about to overreach himself.

M. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, minister of science and technology in the Mitterrand government, seems seriously to have blotted his copy-book. For the best part of a year M. Chevènement's inclinations towards the left of his party have been hidden by his devotion to the cause of social transformation by the beneficent, even lavish, support of research and development, but last week he chose to exceed his brief by speaking in public about the war in Lebanon. Worse still, he gave it as his opinion that President François Mitterrand should invite the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr Yassir Arafat, to Paris. For his pains, M. Chevènement has been rebuked in the most humiliating way, by means of a statement issued through the President's press secretary to the effect that the President and his foreign minister, M. Claude Cheysson, have no immediate need of Chevènement's assistance. Even Chevènement's friends must be wondering what he is about, alienating his colleagues in the French government just when the final decisions are being made about the budget for next year.

First, the good news. Such is the commitment of the President and the government as a whole to the cause of science and technology as the harbingers of innovation and thus of the prosperity that will buy social transformation that the immediate consequences of M. Chevènement's little lapse are unlikely to be serious. With Chevènement's *loi* now through the Assembly, (see page 6), the chances are good that next year's budget will be protected. Whether the same can be said of Chevènement himself is another question.

While ambition is inseparable from politics, ambition that shows too openly is, paradoxically, mistrusted. In the past year, M. Chevènement has been admired in the true Latin sense of the word (*admirare* = "to wonder at") for the clarity and certainty of his promises and envied because nobody expects them to be delivered for several years, let alone during the reasonable tenure by a bright young minister of a single office. During the past few months, Chevènement has succeeded as well as he could have hoped in carrying his *loi* through the French Parliament, but not without making enemies. Now there is some anecdotal evidence that his attention has begun to wander. His recent speeches have been repetitive; during the debate on his bill in the Assembly last week, he confined himself to what he called "laconic remarks". M. Chevènement seems to be preparing himself for other pastures. He may find that they are less hospitable than he would like if he continues to alienate the Elysée and the rest of the leadership.

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