

UK higher education

Call for change

A gang of lounge-suited revolutionaries issued last week a call to turn the British educational system on its head. Calling itself a study group of the Royal Society of Arts, and concealing its subversive message* in glossy covers decorated with an elegant engraving of the Adam building used as its accommodation address, the gang demanded nothing less than the reorganization of the Department of Education and Science (to include industrial training), tax deductibility for fees paid for technological education, the reform of the British school examinations system and a scheme for supporting institutions of higher education with public funds on a scale determined by "the funds which institutions succeed in raising for themselves".

The movement's front-man, and self-confessed chairman of the study group, is Sir Henry Chilver, vice-chancellor of Cranfield Institute of Technology and chairman of the British government's Advisory Council on Applied Research and Development (ACARD). Sir Henry is widely tipped in Whitehall as the man most likely to succeed Sir Alec Merrison (vice-chancellor of the University of Bristol, chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, chairman of the Council of CERN, etc.) as the chairman of most committees on British science policy during the 1980s.

Speaking last week to journalists (out-numbered two to one by members of the group), Sir Henry admitted that the manifesto called for a revolution in the British educational system. He said he would be



All-urpose chairman, Sir Henry Chilver

infiltrating some of the proposals into ACARD's deliberations on the mechanisms for supporting British university research. The group hopes to accomplish its goals by putting pressure on politicians and civil servants, and by writing letters to influential people.

One objective is to change the education of young people aged 16-19, providing them with "flexibility of employment opportunities". The manifesto also demands a "shift in curriculum for 13-16

*The Future of Technological Higher Education in Britain (Report of study group appointed by the Council of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts Manufactures and Commerce)

year olds", a new school examinations system "aimed at encouraging young people to be educated for their future capability in society" and the monitoring of "the effectiveness of education for wealth creation" by some method as yet undisclosed. To accomplish these objectives, the group admits, it would be necessary to rewrite both the Education Act (1944) and the more recent Training Act so as to give a new Department of Education and Training direct control of the education of the young.

There seems, however, to be an ideological split among the members of the group on central direction for higher education. One member, Dr Donald Moore (previously with Imperial Chemical Industries Limited), said that "a lot of money is wasted in universities" and called for strong central management of higher education. But Chilver seems to prefer a system of financial incentives to make universities more aware of industrial needs.

The most subversive proposal is that for replacing the present general subsidy of higher education with a system in which universities and other institutions would be supported on some scale related to the resources they had been able to recruit from industry and elsewhere. The manifesto says that "those most closely related to industry would attract continuing public support" but otherwise conceals its reasons for believing in a switch to "geared funding" and the means by which that would be accomplished, on the pretext of "keeping it short".

John Maddox

Nuclear aftermath

Euthanasia plan

The Soviet media — not normally practitioners of sensation journalism — last week gave major coverage of alleged British plans for "selective treatment" and/or enforced euthanasia of victims of a nuclear disaster. According to the Soviets, plans prepared by the Royal College of Physicians for the British government insist that "anyone who is seriously injured must be destroyed" — preferably by the military or the police, since the doctors, allegedly, are unwilling to break the Hippocratic oath.

These remarkable reports are apparently based on an article in *The Guardian* of 22 July. Within three days it had been picked up by *Pravda* and then by Moscow Radio — remarkably fast for Soviet journalism.

The *Guardian* writer, Andrew Veitch, says that his story was based on "classified" government plans leaked to his newspaper and a "statement" prepared by the faculty of community medicine of the Royal College of Physicians. This statement, he says, was never published.

According to the faculty members, however, the document to which Mr Veitch referred was never, in any sense, an official statement. It was, they say, simply a

discussion paper written by a small "study group" which the faculty board felt itself, as a body, unable to accept.

The president of the faculty, Professor Alwyn Smith, who is also a signatory of the recent "Physicians against Nuclear War" declaration, describes the original paper as "somewhat forthright" and suggests that it would need "very extensive revision" before it would gain the support of the faculty's membership. It is presumably the latest version of this document, which was discussed last April at the faculty's meeting on medical planning in relation to nuclear war, that came into the hands of Andrew Veitch.

Since the speech of Mr Andrei Gromyko at the United Nations Disarmament Session in June, the Soviet media have repeatedly attacked the reluctance of Western governments to respond to Soviet "peace initiatives".

To that extent, their response is predictable. The curious error by which the study group's draft document, which called for a full public debate of the issues (including euthanasia) involved in disaster planning, becomes in the Russian version a secret government document prepared by "troglodytes from the world of medicine" and kept secret from the British people, must inevitably throw some doubt on the Soviet understanding of the Western-style nuclear debate.

Vera Rich

Repression in Guatemala

Physician freed

A prominent Guatemalan physician and anthropologist, Dr Juan José Hurtado Vega, was released from government custody last Thursday after enquiries by a delegation from five US scientific societies.

Dr Hurtado had been held virtually incommunicado, and without charges, since 24 June, when he was abducted by armed men in civilian clothes outside his clinic in Guatemala City. Not until 4 July, in a speech by Guatemalan President Efraín Ríos Montt, did the government admit that Dr Hurtado had been arrested.

According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Clearinghouse on Science and Human Rights, Dr Hurtado was released to the custody of the International Red Cross Committee, which suggests that he was in need of medical treatment. The members of the US delegation that visited Guatemala to enquire after Dr Hurtado told reporters upon their return last week that they were seriously concerned that he had been physically mistreated and possibly tortured. Dr Hurtado's wife reported that during the five-minute visit she was allowed to her husband — a visit that was filmed and broadcast by the state-run television — she noticed that he was very weak, had lost a lot of weight and had a haematoma on his arm. The delegation was told by Guatemalan officials that Dr