

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 "troglydotes 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

Hurtado was in good health and was recovering from a gastro-intestinal illness. AAAS said that Dr Hurtado and his wife were going to leave Guatemala and were due in the United States within a few days.

The reasons for Dr Hurtado's arrest remain unclear. President Rios Montt, in his television address on 4 July, accused Dr Hurtado of being a communist; later, in an interview with a BBC correspondent, Rios Montt charged that "he is not merely a communist but a captain of many units, a member of the leadership group. His son, all his family have been killing people." The US delegates reported that many government officials they spoke to brought up the association of one of Dr Hurtado's daughters with the communist insurgents. She is now living in Nicaragua.

Dr Hurtado may also have come under suspicion for his work among the rural poor. Since 1976, he has run a private clinic offering free health care in San Juan Sacatepequea, an Indian village outside Guatemala City. The delegation doubted



Dr Hurtado and patient

that this was the principal factor behind his arrest, especially since the government has made no effort to shut down the clinic.

The most likely direct motive for his arrest may have been the kidnapping, the day before, of the Interior Minister's son by the Guatemalan communist party. The Interior Minister, or perhaps even a subordinate acting on his own, may have ordered the arrest of Dr Hurtado as a hostage. If so, it was apparently a miscalculation: when the communists issued a list of prisoners whose release they were demanding, Dr Hurtado's name was not on it.

The US delegation, which comprised AAAS, the American Public Health Association, the American Anthropological Association, the National Association of Social Workers and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, expressed concern that this case may be a bellwether of a return to the repression of the previous regime in Guatemala. President Rios Montt, who came to power in March of this year, pledged to restore civil rights and constitutional law. On 1 July, however, the government declared a "state of siege", suspending all political activity and most civil liberties.

Stephen Budiansky

Plea from a Soviet refusnik

An open letter to Dr J.M. Legay, Secretary General of the World Federation of Scientific Workers.

SIR — Several times either alone or together with colleagues in the same position (having been refused permission to leave the Soviet Union), I have appealed to you and to the World Federation of Scientific Workers for help. But only recently have we received a reply — and that not directly, but in the pages of *Nature* (11 February, p.452). I regret to say that your answer was both surprising and disappointing. Being absolutely distressed by it I have to address you once again. Another, perhaps more important reason making me do it is that I am sincerely convinced of your honesty, humaneness and high moral standards — anything else would be incompatible with the high position you occupy. Besides, I believe that the contents of your answer suggest that you are not aware of the gravity of the situation of the scientists refused permission to leave the Soviet Union.

For more than 3 years I and my friends have been trying, through completely legal channels, to obtain permission to leave the country. All of us after many months of waiting have been refused permission and in most cases nobody took the trouble of explaining to us the reasons for this refusal. And none of us has ever dealt with military or state secrets. That is why I say that these refusals do not comply with the laws of the Soviet Union, with the International Human Rights Declaration and with the Helsinki Final Act. The only reason for these refusals is the fact that we have scientific degrees. And it has nothing to do with the problem of the notorious "brain-drain" since most of us are deprived of any professional work and have been deprived of it ever since we applied for permission to leave the USSR.

I have appealed more than 20 times to different Soviet bodies to cancel the illegal decision and to protect me from lawlessness but I have not received a single answer and the experience of many of my colleagues has been the same. Neither have I received any answer from the vice-president of the World Federation of Scientific Workers Mr N.N. Inozemtsev or from Mrs Janushevskaya. But according to the federation's charter, it is their duty to defend the interests of scientists.

Addressing you, Mr Legay, I like many others expect sympathy and help. Maybe it is naive on my part but I consider it your moral duty and that of the federation to help us. It is not a question of me alone, a whole group of scientists is involved. It is not only our careers as scientists, but our

whole lives that are threatened. We suffer material hardships and nervous stress beyond any normal limits. We are beginning to break down. Recently one of us, Dr Tsipkin, died after receiving a dismissal notice. Many of us have become seriously ill — and still we have to support aged parents or our children. We are in complete isolation, we are thrown out of society and in fact are not protected by law. And all this for one "fault", for one "crime" — our wish to leave the Soviet Union.

We are living in the world so strikingly depicted by Kafka, but the circumstances of our life are much harder than those of his characters. We have no possibility in our own country to protest openly, publicly. We can't defend our interests legally. We can hope only for help from our western colleagues. This is our only hope, the only thing that makes it possible for us to go on living.

Don't become a silent accomplice of the injustice, don't let evil take the upper hand, raise your voice for us. I want to believe, Mr Legay, that an appeal from you to the Soviet government, an appeal from the World Federation of Scientific Workers and from its journal *Scientific World* will change our position, will make it possible for us to leave the Soviet Union and to return to scientific work. Don't let our appeal get drowned in bureaucratic hold-ups and procrastinations.

Only an appeal to the Soviet government can change the situation. The more definite, the more public your stand, the sooner it will help the unfortunate. Take this stand, Mr Secretary General, and like any noble deed it will only add to your and the federation's authority.

You cannot but understand, Mr Secretary General, that our life and our fate have become part of an important problem — that of trust among scientists and their mutual understanding. You have to understand that the question of mutual trust and respect, the questions of scientific contacts will depend on the settlement of our problem. It cannot be right to let general and undoubtedly very important problems obscure the fates of individual people. It cannot be allowed that behind a torrent of beautiful words evil should be committed. Who but the World Federation of Scientific Workers and its head can realize and know it? Who but the federation and its Secretary General can and must stand on guard defending the members deprived of everything?

Moscow

J.S. IRLIN, DSci