Pentagon blocks open exchange

Weinberger in optics meeting censorship

Washington

In the latest crackdown by the Reagan Administration on what it says is a dangerous flow of US scientific information to the Soviet Union, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger last month authorized an eleventh-hour move that prevented approximately 100 scientific papers from being given at a San Diego meeting and caused confusion and even "panic", according to one account, when the meeting was held.

The 26th annual international technical symposium of the Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers (SPIE) opened on 18 August on schedule, in spite of the fact that immediately before that, military officials had warned many participants that their papers were too sensitive to be given. The Pentagon had expected 28 Soviet scientists to attend, and it concluded, after checking with the armed services and on the basis of a memorandum to Mr Weinberger, that they represented "a major security problem or disaster". The authors were warned that many papers might not have had proper clearance from the Department of Defense, and about one-sixth of those who had planned to give papers voluntarily withdrew them.

The resulting confusion about clearance procedures led to worried engineers at the meeting badgering military officials to find out whether they would be in trouble if they delivered their papers. Most participants who had carried out their work on defence grants, contracts or subcontracts had cleared their papers through local contracting offices or military bases, in accordance with past procedure. They were apparently unaware of a new rule promulgated in April requiring papers that contain "technical data" of a sensitive nature to be cleared by the Pentagon.

The Pentagon learned of the contents of the meeting only by chance, when an official read a copy of the programme and showed it to Dr Stephen D. Bryen, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for international economics, trade and security policy. "Even if you were a zoologist you would have found that program disturbing", says one military official. "They were going to describe the reconnaissance capabilities of the F-18 fighter and how to see a US guy through the army's obscurants." (Obscurants are smoke or gases used to hide troop movements.) "We didn't withdraw any papers", the official said. "We just warned people they might be in violation of the April rules."

According to the Department of Defense, the authority for the withholding of technical information — regardless of whether or not it should be classified — is the 1954 Arms Export Control Act, as a result of which the State Department issued the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) which prohibit the export of certain kinds of equipment or of "technical data" about its use. In addition, the 1979 Export Administration Act calls for development of a list of strategically important technologies and goods that should not go to the Soviet Union.

SPIE is the principal professional group in a field with many military applications. SPIE officials were upset by what

happened at its meeting and by the resignation over the incident of some of its members. Richard Wollensack, a vice-president of the Itek Corporation and president of SPIE, spent three hours talking to defence officials last week. The society stressed its interest in avoiding future problems with the Department of Defense as well as in the continued freedom of its members to present papers at meetings. Military officials stressed that no blame attached to the society.

But the cure for the problem may be more drastic than the disease. The Department of Defense may form a committee of Pentagon officials to monitor more systematically material to be presented at

West German science after Schmidt

Heidelberg

What are the prospects for science and technology in West Germany if a Christian Democratic administration emerges in Bonn? As described in the party's document on research, *Technologischepolitische Konzept*, the strategy will be to restore the prestige and credibility of research and development in science and technology as keys to future prosperity.

Christian Lenzer, spokesman for the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) on research and technology, emphasizes the need for more basic research, but sponsorship and direction would continue within the existing self-administering framework of the Deutsches Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Max Planck Society, the foundations and large institutions.

In the areas of applied research and development, however, CDU/CSU would change the emphasis from direct to indirect support, thus returning to the pattern of the 1960s for which employers' organizations have been asking.

Industrial research would be primarily self-financed and government support would take the form of indirect financial incentives such as tax concessions (to be assessed by the tax authorities), quicker depreciation of research and development investments, provision of risk capital and tax allowances for patenting and licensing. CDU stresses the importance of free market forces, decentralization and reduction in state control in creating the right climate to encourage performance, risk-taking and entrepreneurial innovation. In particular, small and middle-sized businesses would receive preferential support.

Applied research in public institutions would focus on complex long-term research in transport, communications, aerospace and defence. A better balance would have to be found between the need to protect these areas from short-term political and economic influences and the con-

sequent dangers of bureaucracy and institutionalized decreases in effectiveness and creativity. In general, however, support would be for institutions rather than for projects, partly to reduce the administrative costs involved in assessment. Lenzer points out that the Ministry of Research and Technology employs more than 1,200 advisers at a cost of more than DM600 million. Many members of assessing committees come from large industries and have tended to channel funds away from smaller businesses.

With an eye to French competition, Heinz Riesenhuber, CDU/CSU spokesman on energy, stresses the role of nuclear power in the West German energy programme. CDU/CSU would be more aggressive in the application of proven techniques and development of reprocessing facilities. Highly critical of the ambivalence and delays of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), CDU/CSU would increase state participation in innovative developments such as the prototype reactors, in spite of soaring costs (see *Nature* 26 August, p.783).

In microelectronics, besides software and systems technologies, emphasis would be on widening the technological basis and development and production techniques for highly integrated elements and instruments in communications. CDU/CSU recognize the potential of biotechnology and promise increased state support for work in the field.

On environmental problems, stress is laid on the necessity for providing early anticipatory legal frameworks and also on the possibility of reconciling protection of the environment and economic growth by, for example, investment in energy saving technologies.

A deteriorating economic situation has resulted in no growth in gross national product in the first half of 1982, an increase in unemployment of 49 per cent over 1981 and hard times in the universities and elsewhere.

Sarah Tooze