

Board offers to contribute to the cost. Meanwhile, the authority plans to use the prototype reactor, commissioned in 1974, for further studies of the fast reactor fuel cycle.

Against the general trend, the authority increased its skilled work-force by a hundred to 2,925 during the past year, but expects now to be stationary. There seems to be some concern that the Harwell establishment may not be able to sustain its

present level of contract work for industry, worth more than £25 million a year.

The authority's annual accounts, traditionally among the most laconic of public corporations', are further made obscure this year by the large increase (of

£40 million) in the net cost of operations in the year ending last March, partly attributable (to the tune of £12.5 million) to the cost of writing off the capital cost of miscellaneous fissile material and equipment.

Internees in Poland

Psychiatric abuse claim

Four political internees in Poland have appealed to the World Psychiatric Association, claiming to be victims of psychiatric repression. The four had been temporarily transferred from internment camp to the municipal hospital in Lowicz for treatment in the departments of surgery, internal medicine and laryngology respectively. On 18 August, however, their treatment was discontinued, and they were transferred to the psychiatric wing of a hospital at Zgierz (near Lodz) and placed in the ward for alcoholics. Their letter appeals to the World Psychiatric Association for "speedy intervention".

As the claimants themselves point out, this appears to be the first case of psychiatric reprisals against internees. One Solidarity activist, the logician Jan Waszkiewicz, who was arrested on charges of organizing a strike in the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk and of continuing union activities after the proclamation of martial law, was sent by the court to a mental hospital after the major charge of organizing the strike had been dropped. Friends of Waszkiewicz have said, however, that he seemed to be in a genuinely disturbed state, and that there was nothing sinister in his being transferred to the hospital, where he seems to be undergoing a normal rest cure. He is not receiving any medication or other treatment and is allowed to leave the hospital once a week.

The use of psychiatry as a means of political reprisal has always been abhorrent to Polish psychiatrists. In 1975 there was considerable concern that proposed new mental health legislation would make easier the incarceration of political dissidents in mental hospitals. But after a public outcry, the proposed bill was dropped and Polish psychiatrists — unlike their colleagues in the Soviet Union — avoided the possibility of having to diagnose political dissent or religious enthusiasm as a symptom of schizophrenia.

During its five years' existence (1976–1981), the Workers' Defence Committee KOR, which documented abuses of human and civil rights in Poland, recorded only one attempt at psychiatric confinement — the case of a young man petitioning for the broadcasting of Sunday Mass — and this fell through because psychiatrists were unwilling to certify him.

Under martial law, however, the security services have taken renewed interest in the possibility of psychiatric internment. After

the demonstrations over the May Day weekend, according to underground Solidarity sources, the commandant of one of the departments of the mid-town district of Warsaw, Magistrate Czepinski, applied to Dr Zielinski, director of the Nowowiejski hospital, for facilities for the hospitalization by the civil police of "mentally deviant persons who exhibit a tendency to disrupt public order when various festivities are organized".

Dr Zielinski refused to comply with this request, and reminded Czepinski that the law on psychiatric admissions permits the hospitalization of a mentally sick patient only at his own request, the request of a close relative, or, under carefully defined conditions, by a general practitioner.

The Zgierz incident, however, indicates that not all Polish doctors have the courage and quick-wittedness to follow his example.

Vera Rich

Cryo-transmission microscopy

Fading hopes

Bonn

The three German laboratories developing an electron microscope to operate at the temperature of liquid helium have jointly agreed that at least one of the supposed advantages of their machine is not nearly as great as originally thought. That conclusion, however, is based on observations with only one crystalline sample, and opinions differ as to how serious a setback it represents.

At 4 K, the cryo-transmission electron microscope (cryo-TEM) has the theoretical advantages over conventional machines that molecular movement should be damped and damage to the sample from the beam of electrons minimized. Initially, the reduction in beam damage was estimated to be only modest, so that there was considerable excitement a few years ago when Dr I. Dietrich's laboratory at Siemens AG in Munich — where the superconducting lens for the cryo-TEM was developed — claimed that beam damage at 4 K could be reduced by as much as several hundredfold.

Now the Siemens group has agreed with Dr Jacques Dubochet's group at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in Heidelberg that the protection gained by working at 4 K compared with room temperature is not more than tenfold for standard samples of L-valine.

A few weeks ago, the two groups

Electronics giant

Brussels

While Mrs Margaret Thatcher was in Japan expressing the United Kingdom's concern at Japan's excessive imbalance between imports and exports and attempting to encourage cooperation between Japanese and British high technology companies, another strategy for coping with Japan's exports of electronic goods was under discussion in Brussels. Max Grundig, the founder of the German electronics group that carries his name, recently put before EEC Industry Commissioner Etienne Davignon and Karl-heinz Narjes, the European Commissioner from West Germany responsible for innovation and the internal market his own solution for improving the competitiveness of the European electronic components industry.

Grundig proposed that the European Commission should support a European company for the development and production of electronic components, bringing together the resources of Grundig-Telefunken, Blaupunkt-Bosch and ITT-Schaub-Lorenz. Other European producers would be welcome to join in, with the exception of The Netherlands' Philips and the French group Thompson — the company might be too large and unwieldy if such industrial giants were included.

Grundig is anxious to gain EEC support for his idea in order to side-step both German and EEC anti-trust and monopoly laws. Grundig argues, however, that something must be done soon to meet the threat of Japan's rapidly growing dominance; otherwise he fears there will be grave repercussions for both the consumer electronics industry and for Europe's defence technology companies. He would like his project to be launched as soon as next spring.

The idea of an aggressive new European electronics company met with a warm reception in EEC circles, although there will have to be many further discussions before anything is decided. A meeting has, however, already been arranged of representatives of leading European manufacturers at which Davignon will take the chair.

Jasper Becker