

would be fashioned as those intended to be packed (ten to a rocket) in the MX missile are designed. The trouble is, for the Reagan-Weinberger solution, that attacking warheads might be differently designed, made so as to make large holes in the ground. But in any case, what the generals in charge of the proposed missile park in Wyoming will know up until the last moment is that there has not and will not have been a practical demonstration of the doctrine of fratricide, the argument that the first attacking warhead will prevent others from doing their job. And in the event, uncertainty in a general's mind is more important than any amount of theoretical calculation by professional people who have studied the effects of nuclear weapons on the atmosphere. The calculations may be right, but if the generals do not accept their implications, they may ask the president of their day (unlikely to be Mr Ronald Reagan) to press the button that will prevent a preemptive attack. And he (or she) will have no choice but to agree.

Tell us about our friends

The President of the Royal Society has made a brave speech on Soviet illiberality.

How should a learned society, or for that matter a national rugby football union, conduct international relations with its counterparts in countries whose governments command little respect? This old dilemma is too little discussed, but Sir Andrew Huxley seems to have enlivened this year's anniversary meeting of the Royal Society (see next page) by an account of how deliberate and even obdurate innocence can triumph where diplomacy dictates mere compromise.

Conventional logic goes like this. By convention, (and United Nations charter) governments do not interfere in each others' internal affairs except in those mercifully rare circumstances in which they go to war with each other. National academies (not to mention rugby football unions) are even less well-equipped to effect political change in any sphere. Their analysis of what needs changing, and how, is certain to be less expert than that of the political professionals, diplomats on the international stage. Their assessment of how change might be accomplished is bound to be amateurish. Their resolution to carry through a recipe for change is bound to be compromised by differences of opinion among their members. This is why the Royal Society has been right, in this presidency and the last (Lord Todd's), to insist that the character of the Soviet government was not part of its concern, and was in any case a question outside its competence. If Soviet citizens are locked up or harassed in other ways because Soviet laws expect and exact more from them than do other people's laws, the fact that those injured happen to be scientists (or rugby footballers) is strictly speaking irrelevant. Indeed, when the going is rough, conventional opinion has it that the preservation of close relationships is all the more important. This is the spirit in which Huxley this week insisted that the pitiful trickle of professional exchanges with the Soviet Union should not be compromised by his decision to complain in public about the Soviet academy's apparently deliberate misunderstanding of questions about the ill-treatment of certain Soviet scientists.

Huxley's predecessor, Lord Todd, maddened much of the British scientific community by his proper repetition of the doctrine that sovereign governments of any kind are autonomous within their legal territory, but then won unexpected friends with his fierce attack on Soviet oppression of scientists at the Hamburg meeting on the Helsinki accords three years ago. Huxley's line has been more guileful. Enquire about your friends. When challenged, put the details down on paper. Then hope for the best but anticipate the worst. And when the weasel answer comes that Sakharov has been dealt with leniently, and when you know that he is still confined in Gork'i with the third winter closing in, simply say in public that the explanation is insufficient. The doctrine of the autonomy of sovereign states is an essential foundation of orderliness, and should not be undermined, but what is to prevent us asking after our friends?

Adam Smith forgotten

This week's meeting on international trade could have been disastrous but should have been better.

In the nine years since the last formal meeting of the governments that are party to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the world for which the agreement was originally negotiated has been transformed out of recognition. Nine years ago, the great increase of the international price of oil had only just begun, and few could guess what the consequences would be. Now, of course, we know: inflation and recession in the industrialized world, inflation and stagnation elsewhere. The rich countries are at best marking time, (but Japan, ironically classified at GATT as a country in the process of industrialization, is an exception); the poor are mostly becoming poorer (but countries such as India may yet be exceptions). The barely hidden agenda for this year's meeting seems to have been the wish of industrialized countries to look each other in the eye so as to discover whether they should hold to the principles of free trade on which GATT is founded (and if so whether their partners could be persuaded to obey the rules) or whether they should follow the politically more prudent course and settle for protectionism instead. Although Monday's formal communique reaffirms the principle that free trade is best, only in the months ahead will it be clear how many of the signatories believe that to be the case. (The government of Australia walked out at the weekend on the grounds that the then promised declaration was too leaky a commitment, generously studded as it was with phrases such as "wherever practicable".)

The trouble with GATT, like any other club, is that its members can and will resign whenever they think the costs of membership outweigh the benefits. And the trouble with a club whose members agree to trade freely with each other is that the costs are the more easily perceived. Most industrialized countries, now struggling with unpalatable and perhaps even unsupportable unemployment, know that measures to keep out imports would have an immediately beneficial effect. Domestic customers now buying efficiently-made goods imported from abroad would instead buy less efficiently manufactured domestic products, creating jobs for fellow-countrymen. Only in the longer run would the snags show up — customers required to support inefficient industries are on that account less prosperous than they might be. Two centuries ago, Adam Smith made the point quite simply: the wealth of nations stems from their capacity to bring about a rational division of labour, domestically and internationally.

This time round, GATT has merely stayed still. The constructive parts of the communique on Monday are those referring to studies to be carried out in the first instance by officials on some of the more contentious issues — should free trade extend not merely to manufactured goods but to invisibles — insurance, shipping and the like? (Yes, whatever Japan says.) Should free trade also extend to agriculture? (Yes, even though the European Community is outwardly united in its opposition.) What should be done about counterfeiting? (It should be penalized.) And the plight of countries in the process of industrialization? Who knows? If GATT hopes to survive, it must answer these questions before too many of its members drift away.

Meanwhile, Adam Smith is an evocative reminder that a rational (market-driven) division of labour cannot be accomplished without upheaval. Even in the best-regulated international communities, in the short run one country's industrial gain is likely to be another's loss. In the heady 1960s, when it seemed as if economic growth (and world trade) would continue without interruption, there was endless talk in places such as GATT of the virtues of adjustment assistance — ways of compensating losers for short-term losses. But that talk has now faded. Yet when the danger that nations will barricade themselves behind their trade barriers is greater than ever, the need for such assistance is ironically more urgent than it has ever been.