

French science administration

Chevènement eclipsed

Paris

JEAN-PIERRE Chevènement, French minister of state for research and industry, political motor of the new French technological revolution, has gone, eliminated in the drastic pruning of the French Government last week which reduced the number of cabinet ministers from 34 to 14.

Hitherto, Chevènement has encountered few setbacks. He mobilized France for science, and saw through a law for research meant to guarantee a 17.8 per cent annual real growth rate in French civil research spending to 1985. He took control of all the major research organizations and established effective means of cooperation between universities and industry.

Chevènement's reverses were chiefly the result of characteristic haste, and the opposition this generated.

He followed through his claim that "without a political strategy of research, there can be no political strategy of industry, society or culture" when he became minister of research and industry in June last year but was not at ease in his new role. Private industry claimed he neglected it, while he complained at the inertia of the nationalized sector. This led to an emphasis on rather premature decisions to the neglect of concrete action, and he was accused of excessive intervention.

At the same time, the research community felt abandoned. Although, under pressure from Chevènement, science was exempted from last year's 25 per cent freeze on public spending, leaving a net real increase of 10 per cent over 1981, the Prime Minister's policy of "rigour" advertised for 1983 was a greater menace. Despite the promises of the "loi", the net increase this year will be zero if the rigour applies to research.

Important though these problems may be, however, it is not clear that they are sufficient to explain the resignation of a minister with a reputation for courage. Many point to a political divergence between the leader of Ceres, the quasi-Marxist left wing of the socialist party, and the Mauroy-Delors group. Besides, Chevènement's difficulties in the recent

local elections (he was reelected at Belfort, but only on the second vote) will not have increased confidence in him.

On 22 March, the day his departure was announced, the ex-minister of research and industry issued a communique saying he had offered his resignation on 2 February, because of his disagreement with "the method and conception of the actions of the government". Chevènement has been a fierce opponent of the policy of austerity adopted by the finance minister, M. Jacques Delors, who has now become the strong man of the new government.

Even so, many believe that by quitting now, Chevènement is leaving open the possibility that in the long run M.

Mitterrand may call him back. He would then return untainted by the compromises of "rigour".

What now of research? Already the name of the ministry has changed: no longer research and industry, but industry and research. The new minister is M. Laurent Fabius, ex-minister of the budget, a man close to M. Pierre Mauroy, the Prime Minister, and certainly more at home with financial realities than with great issues of industrial regeneration.

Isabelle Trocheris

Robert Walgate adds:

M. CHEVÈNEMENT never seemed to be a man who would compromise: he came on stage with a dream, enthused many, and left in the same mood. But his supreme confidence in his own concept of science for France, in his scheme for regenerating French industry within a fortress of trade barriers, began to seem like arrogance.

CNRS elections

Colleges indulge democracy

Paris

By an irony of timing, on the day before the French Prime Minister, M. Pierre Mauroy, announced his new government from which Jean-Pierre Chevènement, minister of research and industry, was dropped, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) passed a decisive landmark in the new organization decreed by Chevènement with the election of the sections of its national committee.

As a consequence of Chevènement's famous "loi" (law), adopted by the Assembly last summer, and of the reorganization of CNRS flowing from it, the new "parliament" of CNRS, the consultative committee of researchers in which various fields of research are separately represented, has been enlarged (from 41 to 45 sections) while active researchers are more heavily represented.

Under the new arrangement, 16 members of each section are elected by ballot and electors can vote either for independent candidates or for candidates on lists proposed by the unions — one of Chevènement's innovations.

Last week, there were 720 places to be filled in three separate electoral colleges. The results of the election are as follows:

● **College A** (270 places). This category, which includes directors of research, members of academies and professors at the Collège de France, inevitably offered the greatest proportion of independent candidates. In the event, 139 individuals were elected together with 25 members of moderate or right-wing unions and 106 members of unions closer to the socialists.

● **College B** (270 places). This category includes all CNRS researchers together with researchers of various kinds, at universities for example. The results of the election are more favourable to the government, with 244 seats going to left-wing unions, six to right-wing unions and only 11 to independent candidates.

● **College C** (180 places). This category includes engineers, technicians and administrators. Of the seats now filled, 144 have gone to left-wing unions, 33 to more moderate groups and only three were independent candidates. At this year's election, there was a much better turn-out than in 1978 — 70 per cent overall, with 80 per cent in College A.

In spite of these encouraging results, there was some disquiet at CNRS when Chevènement's departure was announced, principally because the 16 elected representatives of each section will now be supplemented by nine suitably qualified people nominated by the new minister on the recommendation of the director general of CNRS.

The arrival of the new minister, M. Laurent Fabius, could hold up the nomination and, as a result, delay the functioning of the national committee, which has been in suspension during the long months preceding its reform. At the beginning of March, M. Chevènement was promising that the hiatus in the affairs of CNRS would be ended before the month was out.

Isabelle Trocheris



Chevènement left — Fabius right