

## UK Science and Engineering Council

# Money fluctuations to cause cuts

THE decline of the value of sterling in the past six months has caused a crisis in the UK Science and Engineering Council (SERC). SERC pays annual subscriptions to several international research organizations, amounting to about 20 per cent of its annual budget. The decline of sterling means that the council is left with a shortfall of £4.3 million in the financial year 1983-84, which may rise to as much as £10 million a year in the future.

The British Treasury has so far refused to recompense SERC for these fluctuations. And the Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, has herself declined to intervene on SERC's behalf, her promise three years ago to "protect" the science budget notwithstanding. Thus the council has now to find the money from its current programmes. The brunt of the cuts is expected in the long term to fall on nuclear and particle physics, space research and geophysics.

Among others, SERC subscribes to the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Institut Laue Langevin, which together take up roughly 16 per cent of its annual budget (£245 million in 1983-84). SERC's immediate reaction, agreed at a stormy council meeting on 19 April, has been to cut £1 million from the budgets of each of the four grant-making research boards: the Science Board (responsible, among other disciplines, for chemistry, biology and materials science), the Engineering Board, the Nuclear Physics Board and the Astronomy, Space and Radio (ASR) Board.

In the longer term, SERC is praying that the Department of Education and Science (which is responsible for SERC) and the Treasury can find a way of making good the deficit. The Treasury has agreed to consider the problem, which is certain to be occupying the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC).

Severe cuts may, however, still be necessary, in which case the council has decided that the Nuclear Physics and ASR Boards, with the major international commitments, would suffer accordingly.

During this financial year, the council has decided that all studentships should be preserved and that the cuts should come primarily from capital expenditure, as follows:

**Science Board:** Improvements of the Synchrotron Radiation source at Daresbury and the development of the Spallation Neutron Source at the Rutherford-Appleton Laboratory will be delayed.

**Engineering Board:** New grants will be cut, even in major growth areas such as information technology and energy.

**Nuclear Physics Board:** The development of projects for LEP, the electron-positron

collider to be built at CERN, will probably be delayed. The Nuclear Structure Facility (a heavy-ion accelerator) at Daresbury may also suffer. How to save £1 million will be finally decided at a board meeting on 16 May. Contingency plans for the longer term have not yet been developed and the board's chairman, Professor I. Butterworth of Imperial College, London, is at a loss to know how major savings could sensibly be made. He says that the Nuclear Structure Facility has only recently been endorsed by the council after an internal review, and that its capacity and staff will already be smaller than originally planned. On the other hand, a severe cutback in the three experiments planned for LEP would, according to Professor Butterworth, be very damaging for the United Kingdom's future in international collaborations.

**Astronomy, Space and Radio Board:** On 25 April, the ASR Board decided virtually to halt further grant awards in 1983-84, and to cut by 5 per cent non-salary recurrent support for universities and establishments.

ASR's longer term strategy will depend on the five-year forward look to be undertaken by ABRC later this year. But the ASR Board discussed options including further cuts in university support, cuts in research within SERC establishments, major reductions in central computing

facilities and cuts in remote sensing programmes (now a growth area). Four long-term projects were earmarked for protection: the remote sensing satellite project ATSR (part of ESA's ERS-1 project), collaboration with West Germany in the X-ray satellite project Rosat, the optical telescopes at La Palma and the millimetre-wave radiotelescope due to be built at Mauna Kea.

This list leaves question marks over other areas supported by the ASR Board, such as atmospheric physics, magnetospheric physics and satellite geodesy. An attempt may be made to transfer the last of these to the Natural Environment Research Council. The EISCAT project (an upper atmosphere radar), which has suffered from technical setbacks but which is also part of an international collaboration, does not appear to be immediately threatened.

Even more radical decisions may have to be taken by the council, such as the merger of the Royal Greenwich Observatory and the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh or even the closure of an SERC establishment.

In past years, the council has benefited from currency fluctuations when they moved in the more favourable direction. The Treasury's hard line (endorsed by Mrs Thatcher) seems to be that the council must live with the swings and roundabouts. The council would, however, much prefer to be buffered or fully protected from both the benefits and penalties of currency fluctuations which are entirely outside its control.

Philip Campbell

## Lawrence Livermore Laboratory

# Weapons link raises hackles

### Washington

EVERY five years, when the regents of the University of California decide whether to renew their stewardship of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, there is a swirl of campus protest as those who deplore nuclear weapons decry their university's connection with a laboratory which tries to make them work better.

The next bout in the recurring debate was not officially due to begin until 1985 when the existing contract between the university and the Department of Energy expires. But the familiar arguments have got off to an early and unfamiliar start with an official request from Molly Lawrence, Ernest Lawrence's widow, that his name be removed from the laboratory's title. Most of the work done there, she claims in a letter to the regents, dishonours both his name and the name of a great university.

Mrs Lawrence acknowledges that her husband played a big part in the development of the atom bomb and the creation of the original radiation laboratory at Berkeley. At the end of the Second World War, she says, he believed that the existence of the bomb would prevent future wars and that atomic energy would become so cheap and plentiful that it would become

a boon to mankind. "Unfortunately his optimistic views have not been borne out. I believe if he were alive today he would be as adamantly opposed as I am to the monstrous and insane proliferation of nuclear weapons that is still taking place."

The Livermore facility was originally a subsidiary of the Berkeley radiation laboratory, but later became a separate weapons research laboratory operated by the university under a contract with the Department of Energy. Mrs Lawrence wants her husband's name to remain attached to the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and to the Lawrence Hall of Science but removed from the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. She believes the existence of the two Lawrence laboratories confuses the public and also gives a wrong impression of Lawrence's attitude to his work on the bomb. It was, she says, work he did reluctantly and which he would not have wanted to mark his place in history.

Mrs Lawrence's request poses a doubly delicate problem for the regents. To defer to her wishes would risk upsetting another Lawrence family member — Ernest's brother, John, himself a regent and a scientist of conservative views who has consistently voted in favour of retaining