

Canadian technology

Slimmer but more weighty

Toronto

FACED with a predicted loss of two million jobs by 1991 as a result of technological change, the Canadian federal government has set about beefing up the way in which it gets its scientific advice, even if at first sight it appears to be doing exactly the opposite.

The federal Department of Science and Technology is having its staff cut from 170 to about 90 people — but both officials concerned with the reorganization and the independent, though government-funded, Science Council are convinced that it will be a change for the better.

A key change is that Dr Louis Berlinguet, who became the permanent head of the department on 1 June, is also to be the government's chief scientific adviser, a post that previously did not exist in Canada. In that role, Dr Berlinguet, a biochemist with extensive experience both in research administration and government, will sit on key cabinet committees and will have instant access to the decision makers.

Paradoxically, the streamlining is intended to give the Department of Science and Technology the weight it lacked in the past in providing government with high-level strategic planning advice on scientific and technological matters and to meet criticisms that the government's approach to fostering the growth of high-technology industries lacks an overall strategy.

The changes come some months after Mr

Donald Johnston, a minister with combined responsibilities for economic development and science and technology, announced a federal "technology initiative". Almost \$100 million Canadian dollars is to be spent over the next two years on government projects, including \$22 million for a national biotechnology strategy and \$7.5 million to develop microelectronics testing stations. In addition, \$290 million has been earmarked for 15 new technology research and training centres.

But there are worries that in practice it may be difficult for the chief scientific adviser to double as head of the science department, reporting directly to Mr Johnston as his cabinet minister, while advising other ministers through the cabinet committees. Critics feel that to be truly effective, the chief scientific adviser should be independent of any single government department.

For its part, the Science Council is leaning towards the view that for Canada to build up high-technology industries to provide future jobs, the government may have to intervene more directly in promoting new projects than it has done so far. Languishing at an all-time low in the opinion polls, and with an election coming up next year, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's Liberal Government seems unlikely to be making the long-term choices.

Nicholas Hirst

Animal experiments

Researcher cleared on appeal

Washington

DR Edward Taub, the Maryland researcher who was convicted on animal cruelty charges last year following the "infiltration" of his laboratory by an animal-rights activist, has had his conviction overturned by the state's highest court. On 10 August, the Maryland Court of Appeals ruled that Taub was exempt from the state's anti-cruelty statute because the research at his Institute for Behavioral Research in Silver Spring was supported by federal funds.

The case had become a *cause célèbre* for opponents of animal experiments; Taub's conviction marked the first time that state anti-cruelty laws were successfully applied to a scientific researcher. The conditions in Taub's laboratory also became the subject of a congressional investigation which led to proposals for stricter federal laws governing the use of animals in research, and a National Institutes of Health investigation that led to the termination of Taub's \$200,000 grant for research which involved cutting the nerves of monkeys to model the effects of stroke.

Charges were first brought against Taub

when a member of a group called People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals went to the police with pictures he had taken of the laboratory while posing as an interested student willing to work for Taub as a volunteer. Prosecutors focused their case on the failure to provide adequate veterinary care for the monkeys.

Although many states exempt scientific research from their animal cruelty laws, Maryland is not among them, and lawyers are expressing bewilderment at the high court's ruling. "It's a terrible opinion", says Roger Galvin, assistant state's attorney for Montgomery County, Maryland. According to Galvin, the state legislature overwhelmingly rejected in 1982 a proposal to amend the law with a specific exemption for research. The prosecution is preparing a petition to the court to reconsider its ruling.

Taub is claiming exoneration in the court's decision, which he called a victory for freedom of scientific inquiry. Taub's laboratory, however, remains closed and he has no funds at present to continue his research.

Stephen Budiansky

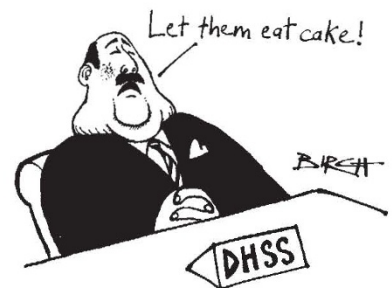
British nutrition

Report to surface at last

THE long-delayed report on nutrition in the United Kingdom, compiled by a working group of the National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education (NACNE) will soon be made available to interested groups, in spite of the continued unwillingness of the Department of Health to give the report its approval.

The report, first drafted two years ago and kept out of the public eye until a few weeks ago (see *Nature* 14 July, p.103) recommends halving the average intake of sugar in Britain, a substantial decrease in dietary fat and a 50 per cent increase in fibre intake. These recommendations are based on publications from the Department of Health, the Royal College of Physicians and the World Health Organization.

The final version was recently approved at a meeting attended by the group's chairman, Professor Philip James of the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, Professor Jeremy Morris, NACNE's chairman, and representatives from the British Nutrition Foundation and the Health Education Council. It was agreed that the report would be circulated this month to interested organizations "to make such use of it as they wish".



Surprisingly, the Department of Health was not represented at the meeting, although it has been extensively involved in proposing changes to the wording of various drafts. Very recently it unsuccessfully proposed a completely new preface for the report. At one stage the department apparently felt that NACNE had exceeded its remit; although it now accepts the need for the quantitative guidance that NACNE offers, it is still unhappy about some of the figures.

The department appears now to be dissociating itself from NACNE completely. A spokeswoman said forcefully last week "Professor James's report has nothing to do with us". James's group apparently started off as a subcommittee but its status has now changed to that of an "informal working group". NACNE's chairman, however, is still "very much hoping" that the department will endorse the report in due course, at least as far as supporting its interim goals.

Tim Beardsley