

Arms embargoes

Contraband cargo upsets Sweden*Stockholm*

THE discovery in Helsingborg last month of a shipment of what appeared to be strategically sensitive material allegedly from the United States via South Africa but destined for the Soviet Union has caused considerable embarrassment in Sweden, which formally maintains a policy of strict neutrality to East and West. Coming, moreover, at a time when the Swedish Government was preparing a declaration of its intention to shoot down any cruise-type missiles infringing on its airspace, the discovery of the Helsingborg hardware, and the subsequent finds of software and further hardware at Stockholm's Arlanda airport and in Malmo, became a matter of unusual delicacy.

The Ministry of Foreign Trade is extremely sensitive about the issue. Members of the Swedish Parliament, when questioned, say they know no more than has appeared in the press. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which is supported by the Swedish Government, was not consulted, although it supports full-time research on problems of the transfer of strategic material. Little more hard information has officially emerged than that some 25 tonnes of suspect material have so far been discovered. An unofficial source in Helsingborg has stated, however, that the finds there included 28 minicomputers of type PDP 11/03 and one of the type PDP 11/23 built by the Digital Equipment Corporation (in the United States), two personal computers of type DSD 8080 made in South Africa, and that the Malmo cache included French computer equipment made under licence in Hong Kong. Among material confiscated in Hamburg, which had formed part of the original consignment, was a VAX/11/782 computer also from the Digital Equipment Corporation.

In the circumstances, the Swedish media have concentrated on the more exotic details of the story. The owner of the Helsingborg containers was identified as Richard Muller, a citizen of the Federal German Republic, who has allegedly been blacklisted by the United States since August 1981 on the grounds of suspected technology transfer to the Soviet Union, and who is said to own a summer villa remarkably close to the Musko secret naval base. More to the point, Herr Muller undoubtedly owns two electronics firms: Semitronik AG in Jesterberg-Wiedenhof and Integrated Time AG in Malers, near Lucerne. According to a Swedish lawyer, Claes Broman, who has been retained by Integrated Time since mid-November, the suspect equipment was intended to be used in joint ventures with one or more (as yet unidentified) Swedish companies.

The South African end, moreover, is alleged to have links with Dieter Gerhart,

who was recently sentenced by a South African court to 20 years imprisonment on charges of espionage for the Soviet Union.

So far, the Swedish Foreign Trade Minister, Mats Hellstrom, has said only that Sweden "actively participates" in the United Nations embargo on the sale of weapons to South Africa, and that the import of such material into Sweden would require a special cabinet order. (In fact, such a law was passed on 22 November, apparently in response to the first Helsingborg find, and made retroactive to cover material which had already arrived in Sweden.) The suspect containers, Mr Hellstrom continued, made the whole question of control over strategic material passing through Sweden one of pressing importance. But he has not committed himself on whether the disputed containers did, in fact, contain strategically sensitive material — this decision has been left to a team of "experts" whose report is imminent.

As a neutral country, Sweden has not acceded to the CoCom embargo on the West-to-East transfer of strategic material. The nature of the impounded hardware and software is, therefore, hard to determine — if the Swedes were simply to check it against the CoCom list, they could be accused of a pro-Western bias — particularly after a meeting on 28 November of the head of export control of the United States Trade Department, Theodore Wu, with representatives of the Swedish export industry, in which he urged them to support the United States viewpoint on the dangers of technology transfer to the Soviet Union. Equally, if the Ministry of Foreign Trade decides that it is, indeed, sensitive material, simply to return it to the United States would not necessarily block the use of Sweden as a transit point for the shipment of other sensitive computer material to the Soviet Union.

A further complication is the widespread rumour that the discoveries have been somehow engineered by an unnamed foreign power to imperil the next round of "Helsinki" meetings on security and cooperation in Europe planned for Stockholm next month. Whatever the decision of Mr Hellstrom's experts, it is likely to evoke adverse public comment.

Even so, the incident has revealed a major deficiency in the international understanding of arms control. Definitions of what constitutes strategic material have so far been left to the military alliances and potential belligerents. For neutral countries such as Sweden, which may be unwillingly compromised by attempts to circumvent the embargoes imposed by the major powers, there are, as yet, no accepted guidelines.

Vera Rich

Paranormality

UK universities vie for funds

RESEARCH into parapsychology may be institutionalized in Britain, and with a royal seal of approval. The Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne, lies behind a move by the University of Wales to establish a professorial chair in the subject, supported from the estate of the late Arthur Koestler, who committed suicide with his wife earlier this year (see *Nature* 302, 93-94; 1983).

Koestler and his wife left £500,000 to support research in parapsychology, and the Koestler Foundation is willing to support a new professorial chair with the interest from a further similar sum. After the bequest became public, the Prince of Wales, who is chancellor of the University of Wales, wrote in his own hand to Dr



C.W.L. Bevan, principal of University College, Cardiff, saying that he would like to see the university make an application for money to Koestler's executors. The idea was unanimously endorsed by the college and by the academic council of the university, and a proposal has now been submitted.

But Wales faces competition from the City University in London and the University of Edinburgh. Professor A. Ellison of City University, president of the Society for Psychical Research and head of the university's electrical engineering department, would like to see a national centre for research in parapsychology based in London, where paranormal phenomena could be subjected to "detailed objective study." He says that such phenomena have often been demonstrated, but that they are not yet repeatable because the parameters for the effects are not known — "it's like electricity in the days before Faraday". Many departments in the university would be willing to support the proposed new professor with their expertise, and Ellison proposes a multidisciplinary advisory council. He would also like to see professional magicians employed to eliminate trickery by subjects claiming paranormal powers. The proposal is to be considered this week by the university's council.

Tim Beardsley