

## Dutch nuclear issues

# Decisions later

*Waalre, The Netherlands*

THE Dutch preoccupation with nuclear energy, military and peaceful, will continue for at least another eighteen months. That is the effect of the decision of the Dutch Parliament on 13 June that a final decision on the siting of US cruise missiles in the Netherlands will be made only at the end of 1985. The Netherlands is the only country out of step with the policy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in this respect.

Never has a subject been discussed so feverishly in the Netherlands. Only the political parties on the right (conservatives and four smaller parties) are in favour of deployment of the missiles, but, according to opinion polls, voters are against the siting plan. On the left, the socialists and three small parties are against, as are the great majority of their voters. The role of the Christian democrats, which together with the conservatives form the government, is especially confusing. Their voters are sharply divided, and they are under heavy pressure from the churches which in advance of 13 June issued declarations asking the government not to install the missiles and in the process offended some church people who hold that the declarations were "too political".

Similarly, the development of civil nuclear power in the Netherlands is on ice, with more than half of the population against it. There are two small nuclear plants (of 60 and 470 MW) now operating, and ten years ago the government proposed building three 1,000-MW plants. But that plan was shelved after a year and a half because of the strength of the opposition, unabated by the oil crisis. But discussion continues, with the churches and the environmental movement playing a prominent part.

Earlier this year (see *Nature* 307, 405; 1984), it seemed the issue had been settled by the report of the officially organized public consultation which in the previous two years had gathered evidence for its conclusion that further nuclear plants are now necessary and that combined heat and power schemes, in industry and domestic applications as well as wind power, should replace obsolete plants in the 1990s. But now it seems that the government is brooding on plans to expand nuclear capacity by 4,000 MW, and leading newspapers have been complaining that this overrides the democratic consultation the government itself had organized.

The government's plans for nuclear power will in fact be published in September but meanwhile the minister of economic affairs, Gijs Van Aardenne, who was unenthusiastic about the report on nuclear power published in January, does not conceal his enthusiasm for further development, while Prime Minister Ruud

Lubbers, in 1974 the minister of economic affairs who put forward the earlier nuclear power plan, is also a supporter.

So the months ahead will be another test for democracy in the Netherlands. Although the debate about the missiles will continue for 18 months, it is barely conceivable that the Netherlands will not follow its NATO partners, despite five years of public demonstrations and social unrest. And the development of nuclear power may follow the same route.

Casper Schuurung

## UK science budget

# Money needed

THE British Government's advisers on the share-out of the civil science budget have warned Members of Parliament of the dire consequences for the nation's research enterprise unless greater provision is made for science over the next decade.

The House of Commons Select Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, which has started an inquiry into the science budget, heard last week from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC), represented by its chairman, Sir David Philips, Dr Walter Bodmer, director of research of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, and Dr Derek Roberts of General Electric Company Ltd. On the basis of published government expenditure estimates, ABRC predicts that the real value of scientific research is set to decrease by 25 per cent over the next decade.

This stark prediction arises from a number of effects that diminish the value of the research budget, which at first sight is planned to remain roughly constant in real terms. Firstly, according to ABRC, the science vote has had largely to compensate for an 11 per cent cut in recent years to university support of science from the University Grants Committee. Secondly, the Treasury's assumed annual cash increase for the science vote, which decreases from 3 per cent per year to 2.5 per cent per year over the next decade, is fully 2 per cent less than the Treasury's estimated annual increase in the retail price index. This alone would produce a decrease of 17 per cent over the 10 years in real terms.

On top of this, there is the problem of superannuation payments for the increasing number of retired research council staff. And the perennial problem of subscriptions to international organizations still remains. ABRC members emphasized last week their conviction that science had lost out in recent years in relation to other publicly supported activities, while the increasing sophistication of scientific equipment has meant that the same amount of money bought less. And they were disturbed that the government's published expenditure plans include no special reference to the value of science in the economy.

Tim Beardsley

## Acid rain

# UK in minority of one

THE British reputation for waywardness in the eyes of many Europeans seems unlikely to be improved this week at the World Conference on the Environment, taking place in Munich at the behest of the government of West Germany to discuss ways of combating atmospheric pollution. At the opening session on Monday, Dr Martin Holdgate, chief scientist of the British Department of the Environment, declined to give any firm commitment to reduce British emissions of sulphur dioxide, saying only that a range of measures was being considered that would allow Britain to reduce emissions "in a cost-effective way".

In Germany, acute concern over damage to forests is leading to pressure for drastic reductions in acidic emissions, chiefly sulphur dioxide from power stations and nitrogen oxides. But Dr Derek Pooley, chief scientist at Britain's Department of Energy, said last week he was "convinced that sulphur dioxide was not the major culprit in causing damage to forests".

A major study on acid deposition published last week by the department's energy technology support unit emphasizes the uncertainties. Forest damage appears not to correlate well with sulphur dioxide concentration when dry deposition from local sources is excluded. But above an altitude of 600 metres, which is where most of the damage occurs, photochemically produced ozone can reach sustained and high concentrations. Although no mechanism for ozone damage is known, one suggestion made in the Department of Energy's study is that ozone causes damage to leaf cuticle, which in turn allows leaching of magnesium as the pH falls. But Dr Bill Binns of the Forestry Commission, who has made

## Cost of impure mice

*Washington*

A UNIVERSITY of Wisconsin researcher has won an out-of-court settlement with Charles River Breeding Laboratories over a mix-up of mice that the researcher said caused her to waste a year's work and set back her career. Dr Brenda Kahan will receive an undisclosed monetary settlement; in addition, the University of Wisconsin will receive \$40,000 from Charles River as compensation for research and overhead expenses of the invalidated research. Two-thirds of that \$40,000 will support Kahan's research.

Charles River, a major supplier of laboratory mice, shipped large numbers of genetically impure mice to researchers who believed they were getting a pure strain. The company says it has now corrected the problem.

Stephen Budiansky