

Australian nuclear policy

Non-nuclear election party

Canberra

THE Australian Labor government's uranium export policies and the combined presence of joint US-Australian defence facilities at North-West Cape, Nurrungar and Pine Gap are looming large as issues in the forth-coming federal elections to be held on 1 December. Perhaps the most unexpected development in the run-up to the election has been the swift rise to prominence of a new single-issue political party — the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP), formed only in June, which appears likely to capture at least one seat in the half-Senate election, if recent polls are to be believed. The polls also suggest that the government will retain power in the lower house, with the personal popularity of the Prime Minister, Mr Bob Hawke, a large factor.

The Senate (the upper house), however, is the Achilles heel of the Labor Party, and triggered the downfall of the Whitlam government in 1975. In a Senate in which the government may again not gain control, NDP says that if elected, its members will vote only on questions relating to uranium, disarmament and the joint facilities. Ironically, this would limit their capacity for log-rolling deals, since the conservative opposition parties are likely to vote with the government on most nuclear issues. Mr Hawke said that a vote for NDP would be wasted and hastened to point out the Labor government's achievements in the disarmaments sphere. He added that, as the South-East Asia/Pacific region member country "most advanced in the technology of atomic energy including the production of source material", Australia has a designated seat on the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency and has recently become a member of the United Nations Security Council.

Since July 1983, Australia has been represented in international forums by an ambassador for disarmament, Mr Richard Butler, and funds have been made available for a peace studies centre at the Australian National University, in support of the comprehensive test-ban. As well as attempting to help solve the procedural problems that have plagued the conference on disarmament, Australia is also playing a large role in the current technical trials of an international test-ban verification network, run by the Geneva Group of Scientific Experts on Seismic Events (GSE). Coordinated from the Bureau of Mineral Resources in Canberra, Australian seismic stations at Alice Springs (Northern Territory), Narrogin (Western Australia), Charters Towers (Queensland) and Mawson (Antarctica) transmit data to Melbourne for relay to the other centres (Washington, Moscow and Stockholm) through the World Weather Watch telex system.

But the disillusioned ex-Labor supporters and young people of NDP reject the government's whole nuclear package. They believe Australia's best interests lie in closing the joint defence facilities and in leaving Australia's large reserves of uranium in the ground. **Jeffrey Sellar**

European all-change

PROFESSOR Eugen Seibold, president of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, was appointed president of the European Science Foundation at the tenth annual meeting of the foundation in Strasbourg last week. Professor Seibold succeeds M. Hubert Curien, president of the foundation since 1980, who has felt it necessary to resign on his appointment as Minister of Research in the government of France. Professor Seibold has been active in the foundation's activities since its inception, recently as vice-president.

The Strasbourg meeting last week also appointed as the foundation's secretary-general Mr Michael Posner, until two years ago chairman of the British Social Science Research Council. Mr Posner succeeds Dr John Goormaghtigh, secretary-general at Strasbourg for the past six years.

The members of the foundation last week agreed that the budget for the coming year should amount to just under FF10 million, an increase of some 9 per cent compared with the previous year. In addition, the members of the foundation, mostly grant-making research councils, have agreed to contribute an equal amount to the cost of the foundation's "additional activities" — cooperative research projects to which interested members contribute and in which they usually participate. □

Acid outback rain

Canberra

ACID rain in the outback of Australia? Surely not. Yet this is the conclusion of two independent teams of atmospheric scientists on the hydrogen-ion concentrations in rainwater at sites hundreds of kilometres apart in Australia's Northern Territory. The teams, led by Dr Gene Likens of the Institute of Ecosystem Studies of the New York Botanical Gardens and Dr Barry Noller of the Office of the Supervising Scientist, Alligator Rivers Region Research Institute, presented their results at an international conference on the scientific application of baseline observations of atmospheric composition, held earlier this month at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) Division of Atmospheric Physics in Aspendale, Victoria.

Both groups found that at their respective rainfall sites at Katherine, 200 km

Yugoslavia

Brain drain

AN "irresponsible attitude" towards science and scientists has produced a massive brain drain from Yugoslavia, according to a new survey from the Zagreb Centre for Migration Research, reported by the Belgrade daily *Politika-Ekspress*.

According to the latest figures, during the past two decades some 5,000 Yugoslav specialists have left, with a peak of 1,371 leaving in 1968-73. The basic reasons, according to *Politika-Ekspress*, are "bureaucratic harassment", inadequate opportunities for promotion, or even the total lack of a job, and the desire for higher earnings and a higher standard of living. Vujica Jevdrevic, an expert in hydrology employed by the United Nations, who could not obtain "adequate conditions to continue his work" in Yugoslavia, and decided to remain in the United States. The "celebrated mathematician". The nuclear physicist Bogdan Maglic was fired from his Yugoslav post as a result of a bureaucratic error, while he was in the United States doing advanced studies, so that he decided not to return.

According to *Politika-Ekspress*, the brain drain is motivated by practical and economic considerations, and there are (implicitly) no political factors involved. Indeed, it is noted that "the highest political bodies and the Yugoslav leadership" have recently been demanding that the "irresponsible" stance of the bureaucrats towards science and scientists should be substantially reformed. It is noteworthy, however, that the peak years of emigration, 1968-73, cover the purge of scholars associated with the Matica-Hrvacka movement in Croatia, and a subsequent similar purge of intellectuals in Serbia. **Vera Rich**

south-east of Darwin, and Jabiru, 300 km east of Darwin, the average hydrogen-ion concentration was about one-third that of the corrosive acid rains of northern Europe and North America. The difference is that the sulphate and nitrate ion concentrations are at least an order of magnitude less than the Northern Hemisphere measurements and that the high hydrogen-ion concentration is accounted for by the unexplained presence of formic, acetic and other weak acids. At some sites, pH readings as low as 3 have been recorded. The organic acid concentration is highest in the early part of the wet season (November-December) and lowest in the monsoon period (January-March). Dr Likens is reported to have been keen to undertake the 30-month study in order to determine what atmospheric chemistry was like "before the Industrial Revolution".

Jeffrey Sellar