Soviet espionage

Furore over French allegations

Le Monde, the Paris daily, has caused a furore by publishing what is alleged to be a secret report from the Soviet Ministry of the Aviation Industry on the "utilization of positive foreign experience"—in other words, industrial espionage. The disclosure, which coincided with the opening of high-level Franco-Soviet economic talks, caused the Soviet embassy in Paris to issue denials of this "flagrant disinformation" in even more vigorous terms than usual.

Le Monde claims that the disclosures were leaked to it by French intelligence and were the evidence on which President François Mitterrand expelled 47 Soviet diplomats two years ago. They include a description of the alleged inner workings of VPK, the Commission on Military Industries, which is said to issue "shopping lists" to Soviet representatives abroad, specifying what high-technology information the military establishment needs most urgently.

Claims that such lists exist have surfaced regularly in West Germany, and a recent Swedish survey of alleged Soviet industrial espionage by Charlie Nordblom (*Industri Spionage*, Timbor Förlag, 1984) specifically alleged that the State Committee for Science and Technology and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR are involved in compiling them.

The euphemistic Soviet description of the undertaking is not to be wondered at. At one time, the United States ran a Soviet-watching project, operating from the Weisbaden air force base in West Germany, known as STEP, the Science and Technology Exploitation Program.

The Soviet Union may have had advance warning of the impending disclosures in *Le Monde*. The president of the Academy of Sciences, Dr Anatolii P. Aleksandrov stressed to the general assembly of the academy last month that the Soviet Union intended to rely even less in future on imported know-how, while a few days before *Le Monde* published the documents, Radio Moscow broadcast an extensive interview with an "expert of the Soviet State Planning Committee", Dr Aleksei Petrov.

Petrov complained that the West had long suggested that Soviet technical progress depended on Western know-how, but "facts are facts and they show something quite different". During the past 20 years, Petrov said, the Soviet Union sold to the United States twice as many licenses as it had purchased, and almost two-thirds of Soviet imports consisted of raw materials.

Petrov's data, of course, referred to the civilian sector, while the *Le Monde* documents refer primarily to military aviation. To a Soviet planner, however,

the distinction would probably seem artificial. The extremely low figures for military expenditure published in the Soviet budget (around 18,600 million rubles annually) make sense only if they refer to the replacement of existing military hardware, with military research and development absorbed by the civilian sector.

Vera Rich

Australian veterinary science

Lab. at last

Canberra

AFTER several years of to-ing and fro-ing about its value and safety, the \$A160 million Australian National Animal Health Laboratory (ANAH) was officially opened early this month. The ultra-secure laboratory at Geelong, 70 km south-west of Melbourne, was designed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) for rapid diagnosis of and research into exotic livestock diseases, especially foot and mouth disease virus (FMDV), not detected in Australia since 1872.

Over the years, the unfinished laboratory has been a repeated source of political contention. Two issues have arisen—the high cost of the facility, and the objections of many in Australia to the notion that FMDV might be imported, even if for research only, into a virus-free continent.

The laboratory is designed on the "box within a box" principle, in which the work area of highest security is at the centre of the building and is surrounded by a series of "boxes" of decreasing security classification.

For the present, ANAH scientists are conducting investigations into endemic local diseases such as bovine leucosis and rhinotracheitis, and are attempting to clone the gene for the two outer protein coats of the local bluetongue virus, a serotype of which was isolated from insects collected in Northern Australia in 1977. In a few months, however, it is likely that work will begin on several exotic diseases including rabies, swine fever virus, Aujeszky's disease (pigs), exotic bluetongue, Newcastle disease (poultry) and vesicular diseases which could be mistaken for FMDV. Ultimately, permission may be granted for work on virulent exotics such as rinderpest or rift valley fever, but the importation of live FMDV has been shelved until 1987 at the earliest.

The laboratory will cost \$A8 million a year to operate, but an outbreak of foot and mouth disease would result in the loss of an estimated \$A3,000 million in export earnings.

Jeffrey Sellar

European research

Curien wants more

Strasbourg

PLANS for using science and technology to improve Europe's competitiveness with the United States were put forward in a speech to a gathering of geologists on 1 April by M. Herbert Curien, minister of research in the government of France. Curien's proposals, which have been hammered out over the past few months by groups of scientists and politicians, are to be presented to the Council of Europe early in May, at a meeting called for by M. François Mitterrand, the French president.

One of Curien's themes was European collaboration in space research and development, chiefly through the European Space Agency (ESA). The past twelve years of ESA's work, Curien said, had been creditable, but he urged last week that by the end of the century, Europe should be in a position not merely to build and launch satellites but to put men and women into space and to provide a full "customer service".

More generally, Curien said, Europe could respond to the apparent superiority of the United States in science and technology only if it were "united, ambitious and autonomous". Specifically, Curien lent his weight to proposals of the European Communities and the European Science Foundation (ESF) for research "networks". Since last September, some 50 proposals have been put forward and have now been whittled down to about a dozen.

The network plan is to involve groups of European research laboratories on common projects, much as several different groups of European geophysicists are now involved in the European Geotraverse project of deep seismic sounding (begun in 1983 by ESF). Last week, Curien referred to neurosciences and polar studies as potentially fruitful areas for collaboration on the same pattern.

Curien also wrung his hands last week over one of Europe's longstanding problems, the difficulty of encouraging mobility within the research community. He said that there were signs, in France, that mobility had recently declined. The difficulty, now as previously, is to devise appropriate incentives for the encouragement of mobility. There remain, said Curien, delays in arranging for the exchange of people, financial assistance to people on the move is lacking while there are even difficulties in transferring equipment across national frontiers. He urged that the impetus for the better coordination of the European research community should come from scientists themselves rather than from rule-bound institutions.

Peter Gambles