

Creation science

Rot sets in in Queensland

St Lucia, Queensland

IN Australia's sunshine state of Queensland, worried academics and teachers are preparing for a re-enactment of the "creation science" debate of the past few years in the United States. Their concern is that Queensland's Minister for Education, Mr Lin Powell, has ordered the teaching of creationism in state high schools. Whenever teachers raise the subject of evolution, they are also now obliged to present the conflicting arguments for creation and catastrophism.

Hitherto, many of Queensland's teachers have exploited a convenient loophole in Mr Powell's edict: they were not instructed how to teach creation science. But the minister now intends to close that loophole by spelling out to teachers exactly how they should present creationism in the classroom. His plans are being formulated with advice from the Creation Science Foundation (CSF), an organization that maintains a constant barrage of creationist propaganda from its headquarters in the Brisbane suburb of Sunnybank. At present, Queensland is the only Australian state where creationism is officially included in the school science curriculum, although some academics and teachers believe that it is being taught unofficially elsewhere.

CSF, which describes itself as a "faith-funded organization", publishes the glossy magazine *Ex Nihilo* at an annual cost of more than \$40,000. The magazine is delivered to all state high schools in Queensland (with approval from the Minister for Education), and also finds its way into school libraries in other states.

Late last year, the librarian at a high school in the Northern Territory judged *Ex Nihilo* to be unsuitable for children and requested CSF to send no further issues. CSF gave a prompt response in its newspaper *Prayer News* — it published the name and address of the offending school and urged its readers to write expressing disapproval. The editor of *Prayer News* commented that it was a "dangerous situation" when a library refused to accept a gift of *Ex Nihilo*. Eventually, the hapless school librarian capitulated under mounting pressure from CSF and its supporters.

While *Ex Nihilo* brings creationism to a general audience (including children), CSF has also launched a second periodical destined for only the most erudite creationists. The *Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* is laid out in the format of many reputable scientific journals and purports to give an in-depth treatment of the latest development in creation research.

CSF, not content merely to make inroads into the educational system, now also offers its own correspondence courses in creation science, which may be attractive to teachers seeking additional "qualifications". The gratifyingly large number of

enrolments (more than 90) has prompted CSF to start selling its courses in the United States, where it already has representatives to promote sales of its literature. Most recently, CSF has revealed plans for a "world class museum as a teaching centre on creation".

So far, the creationist campaign has met no organized opposition from the scientific community. Not a single scientific society has spoken out against the bogus science of creationism. The Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science has remained silent, as has the Australian Academy of Sciences. Representatives from all major scientific organizations, gathered in Canberra on 16 April for the inaugural meeting of the National Committee for the Promotion of Science

and Technology, might well have been expected to voice some opinion on the issue, but did not.

Nevertheless, many individuals — scientists and teachers, students and parents — are beginning to express concern about the unchecked growth of creationism. On 22 March, an audience of nearly 400 gathered at the University of Queensland to hear a series of lectures exposing the fraudulent basis of creation science, as a result of which an action group has been formed in resistance to the creationist campaign.

The action group has adopted the name Australian APE (Australian Association for the Protection of Evolution), and aims publicly to refute the claims made by creationists and to press for the removal of creationism from the school science syllabus. It is assembling "survival kits" for schoolteachers who find themselves unwillingly obliged to teach creationism.

Tony Thulborn

Soviet computers

Keeping up with the students

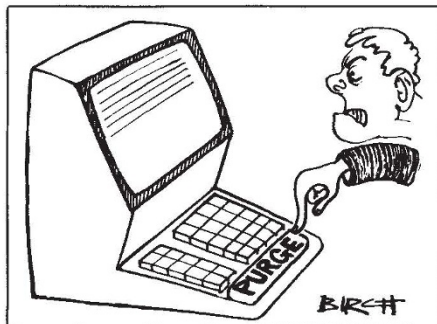
THE Soviet Union has launched a major programme for computer literacy in schools, apparently in response to complaints by Dr Vyacheslav Elyutin, Minister of Higher and Specialized Secondary Education, that the poor performance of certain sectors of the Soviet economy is attributable to the lack of computer-mindedness among middle managers. During the coming academic year, a course in "Fundamentals of information science and computer technology" is to be introduced in all secondary schools, initially in the ninth and tenth forms (for 15 to 16 year olds), and

from another Moscow secondary school using computers and visual display units under supervision and even making microcalculators and assembling printed circuit boards for local industry as part of their "work training experience".

The logistical problems of the new courses are considerable. Soviet school textbooks are usually published in editions of 4 million and software packages will have to be produced on the same scale. Dr Monakhov last month visited the United Kingdom for an international study group on the introduction of computers in schools but, on his return, told a Moscow radio reporter that although he had had considerable opportunity to get acquainted with teaching software of British companies, including Acorn and Sinclair, he found them for the most part unsuitable for Soviet use. The Soviet educationalists were therefore, he said, faced with the "tremendous" task of developing their own software.

Hardware is also liable to cause problems. It is not simply a matter of choosing the computer that is "most suitable" to the teaching profession, Monakhov explained, but also to ensure that Soviet industry is capable of producing such a computer by September. The plans for training of teachers for the new courses also seem unrealistic. Crash courses for teachers of mathematics and physics will be organized (presumably during the summer vacation). Since the Politburo decision also supposes a vast expansion of extra-curricular computer facilities for young people, organized through creativity clubs and the Pioneer youth movement, many teachers may well be faced with pupils more familiar with computers than they are themselves.

Vera Rich



later for younger students. Experiments are also planned in the use of computers in teaching other school subjects, as for example in processing the data obtained in physics or chemistry lessons.

Experiments in the use of computers in schools seem to have been going on for some time. According to Professor Vadim Monakhov, director of the Institute of Teaching Content and Methods of the Soviet Academy of Pedagogic Sciences, one such course was introduced in a Moscow school (specializing in mathematics) as early as 1960. Shortly before the recent Politburo decision, a Soviet television feature showed children