

Britain stays in CERN but wants "extensive savings"

- Relief among scientists as pressure lifted
- UK government persuaded by review

London

THE British government seems to have been persuaded of the merits of remaining a member of the Geneva-based European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). The British delegate told last week's meeting of CERN council that "the UK wishes to remain a full and active member of CERN provided that a sound base for doing so can be established". The announcement was greeted with relief by British scientists at CERN; it had been feared that Britain would give provisional notice to quit unless an acceptable level of saving could be identified. In the event, Britain was content to place weight on the findings of the CERN review committee, chaired by Anatole Abragam.

Britain's official statement to the council read: "Council must respond positively to the Abragam report and must not allow the recommendations to be watered down — the situation is far too serious for that". It continued: "It will be difficult for the UK to remain a member unless major savings can be made in the cost to existing member states". Britain urged the council to look at ways of widening membership

Research spending in the Netherlands

Waalre, The Netherlands

REVISED figures from the Dutch Ministry of Education and Science show that investment in research and development during 1985 and 1986 was far greater than previously thought. In contrast to earlier estimates of a 7.5 per cent growth, the growth achieved was 16.7 per cent for 1985 and 13.4 per cent for 1986. Growth estimates for 1987 and 1988 have consequently been revised from 3.4 to 5 per cent.

The total national investment in research in 1987 was about Dfl10,100 million (about £3,000 million), about 2.34 per cent of the gross national product (GNP), compared with a previously published figure of Dfl 9,300 million, 2.15 per cent of GNP.

The new projection for science spending in 1988 is Dfl 10,400 million, compared with a previous estimate of Dfl 9,350 million. Based on the new figures, industry's investment in research in 1987 was Dfl 5,730 million, and that of government was Dfl 4,183 million, of which the universities received Dfl 1,630 million, Dfl 70 million less than in the previous three years.

Casper Schuurin

of CERN to include non-European states. It is still unclear whether the Abragam recommendations will produce the sort of savings that Britain deems acceptable.

The final report of the review committee differs little from the unpublished interim report, presented to member state governments last June (see *Nature* 327, 648; 1987). Abragam remains adamant that CERN's science must remain untouched. Instead, "extensive budget savings" could be achieved principally through improved management efficiency and reduced staffing levels. A reduction in the scientific programme would "bring only relatively small savings out of proportion with their drawbacks".

Personnel costs at CERN account for SF377 million in 1987 (the annual materials budget is SF395 million), covering the salaries of 3,340 staff members, 91 per cent of whom have indefinite contracts. There are more than 900 service-contract personnel, many of whom work permanently at CERN, and some 4,000 registered outside users. The report points out that while other organizations employ most staff on indefinite contracts, CERN has to provide a pension fund.

Abragam recommends a programme of early departures, with the loss of 300 staff through voluntary and, if necessary, compulsory redundancy in the next three years, together with natural departures at a rate of 60 per year. The cost of termination indemnities and compensation to the pension fund would be SF115 million, which would need to be borrowed and repaid by 1993.

In addition, Abragam would reduce from the present 86 per cent to 50 per cent the proportion of indefinite contracts for 'category A' employees (including physicists, engineers, technical staff and higher administrative staff). Abragam would also like to see examined the possibility that support staff might be employed by CERN subsidiaries under Swiss or French law, abolishing their present international-employee status. CERN management is thought to be unhappy with this. The report advocates new personnel practices, including performance assessment.

CERN management is understood to be in agreement with much of what Abragam recommends, and has started to implement several of the suggestions. But some resentment has been engendered by what is seen as a subjectively aggressive tone to the report.

Simon Hadlington

US budget down under the wire

Washington

THE silly season has arrived for the US budget process. The government officially ran out of money at the end of the day on Friday, 18 December, but Congress held an extraordinary Sunday session implementing a one-day extension to cover spending until midnight on Monday, 21 December. As *Nature* goes to press it is anybody's guess whether a final agreement on the budget can be reached before the current extension expires. If Congress fails to adopt an extension or to pass the total 1988 spending package, the government will technically have to shut down.

Nearly all government spending is contained in a \$600,000 million appropriations bill. Negotiators from the House of Representatives and the Senate have been meeting for weeks to resolve spending differences between the two chambers. As the budget process marches inexorably to completion, last-minute changes for government agencies are not only possible, but likely.

Even when the Congress decides on the numbers, the language in the bills, still to be written, will affect how the money may be spent. The proposed doubling of the National Science Foundation (NSF) budget does not appear to be occurring as rapidly as originally proposed. As of last week, NSF's spending figure was \$1,717 million, \$94 million more than 1987, but \$176 million less than requested. It is still uncertain how these new figures will affect spending on the science and technology centres proposed by NSF, hailed as crucial for US economic competitiveness.

Also last week, conferees agreed to spend \$425 million on the space station, some \$342 million less than NASA had been seeking. The spending is apparently authorized in two parts; \$200 million now and \$225 million after June 1988.

Congress is in no mood to commit to major new spending projects, as finding politically acceptable places to cut the budget is nearly impossible. Joseph Palca

New Pasteur director

Paris

THE Pasteur Institute in Paris last week appointed a new director. Dr Maxime Schwartz, aged 47, a molecular biologist, will replace the outgoing director, Raymond Dedonder, whose term of office has expired. Schwartz joined the Pasteur in 1963 and in 1972 became head of the molecular genetics unit. In 1985 he was elected deputy director of the institute, having been a member of the scientific council and head of the molecular biology department for several years.

P.C.