

of the process of academic disputation by which university departments are made the contentious places. Ultimately, only an academic's close colleagues can accurately tell the difference between academic eccentricity and misguided incompetence. If the British government's complaint had been that academics have been less than zealous in making these judgements of their colleagues' good sense, that might have carried weight. But that it should think of creating circumstances in which the careers of apparently eccentric academics should be terminable by outsiders, with interests different from their own, is a principle than should not be conceded, whatever forms of words Lord Mackay produces. Meanwhile, the British government may note regretfully, one benefit of what may be called the Bologna solution is that it would have fallen to others than itself to solve the problem. Indeed, as the legend of Bologna shows, the secret of a university's survival is the particular blend of tough-mindedness and tolerance that marks out the better institutions. □

Too much for food

An international comparison shows that all industrial nations spend too much on subsidizing food.

AFTER years of intercontinental squabbling between those industrialized nations who also behave as if it were vital to their national interests that they should maximize their agricultural production, these partners in crime are beginning to get to grips, within the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with the enormity of their transgressions of commonsense. Their chief incentive is the certainty that within the next three to five years, as the new round of negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade gets under way, they will be further exposed to external pressure to behave sensibly. But there is also the continuing tripartite squabble in which the three chief trading blocks repeatedly accuse each other of over-subsidizing domestic agriculture with such ferocity that serious damage is likely to be done to their other interests.

None of this implies that cut-throat competitive farm subsidies (decreed by governments, but financed by consumers either as taxes or as higher prices) are about to end. That would be too much to ask for. What the industrial farm producers are now about is merely to investigate the enormity of their subsidies to agricultural producers. The task is not a simple one, given the multiplicity of the means by which subsidies can be paid, so that OECD's figures are best used comparatively. But there can be no question that the subsidies are enormous — a calculated average of 47 per cent of the value of agricultural production in 1986. Among the members of OECD, the percentage subsidy ranges widely, from 15 per cent in Australia to 75 per cent in Japan. The European Communities, at 50 per cent, are just above the middle of the range, with the United States way back in the field at 35 per cent.

Several questions arise, of which one of the chief is that of whether it can make sense for the industrialized farm-surplus nations vigorously to attack each other for subsidizing farm production when, evidently, they are all doing more or less the same. Second, there is the serious question whether they are now so wedded to the practice that they may not be able to give it up; the plight of farming communities caused by the ending of subsidies would not be the less harrowing (or politically influential) because the cause was just. Probably the best that can come out of GATT will be an understanding that subsidies will at least be contained for a time. The real losers in this controversy are not the farming communities but the still larger company of food-consumers throughout the world, to whom the cost of food is getting on for twice what it needs to be, not to mention the developing nations of the world, for many of which agricultural production would be a palatable substitute for the poverty in which they now live. □

Delayed START

A superpower deal on strategic missiles will not now come next week, but that does not spell tragedy.

NEXT week's meeting in Moscow between President Ronald Reagan and Mr Mikhail Gorbachev seems unlikely to see the signing of a treaty to reduce numbers of strategic nuclear missiles by a half, but that is understandable and forgivable. Indeed, the two men will be lucky if they can announce that last year's treaty on intermediate missiles (INF) has been ratified. On past weeks' form, the US Senate will still be debating the issue when Reagan leaves to catch his plane. Yet neither is blaming the other because there is no strategic treaty, even though both were saying just six months ago in Washington that they were aiming at just that. What has happened since then to make them so tolerant of the delay, and of each other?

Gorbachev has other things on his mind. The party conference arranged for Moscow at the end of June, at which the policy of *perestroika* will be affirmed, denied or possibly watered down, is in every way more important — for the United States as well as the Soviet Union. Naturally, it might even have helped to make the conference go well if there had been a strategic treaty to sign, but the seriousness of the outstanding issues and the delay in the Senate over ratification of INF may have persuaded Gorbachev that it would be preferable, instead, to deal with Reagan's successor.

What can be expected to happen after all the dust has settled? The INF treaty, while it helps to strike a safer strategic balance in Europe and elsewhere, is a huge legal agreement stuffed with carefully negotiated details, which is one reason why the US Senate ratification has been so slow. But the Senate is not on that account to blame. The successful negotiation of INF last year broke new ground in the design of treaties of this kind in the acceptance by both sides of the principle that verification should be thorough and comprehensive.

That is as it should be, but the result has been the string of questions arising in the past few weeks. How can we tell what kinds of missile components are in canisters we are not allowed to open? Can foreign nationals exercising their treaty rights to inspect parts of a factory once used to manufacture of a forbidden missile also look at other parts, supposedly concerned with a missile model not forbidden by INF? Especially because changing circumstances will complicate the interpretation of the language that now constitutes the treaty, there is something in the view that such a complicated treaty is a recipe for trouble. Yet the draft of the strategic treaty (affectionately called START) is already 300 pages long, consisting mostly of references to questions yet to be negotiated. May it already be too long to be workable, except by teams of international lawyers?

That is one of the reasons why the arms control process needs to be thought through again. The present climate of mutual regard (trust would still be too strong a word) between Washington and Moscow, much changed even in the past year, suggests that it would now be best to concentrate not on the grand goals but on the smaller issues that might be simply as well as quickly settled. Given that INF will have its chief effects on the European balance, but that a little time will have to pass before shorter-range nuclear weapons can also be regulated, should not more energy go into the regulation of conventional forces in Europe? May this not also be a time for hoping that the comprehensive test-ban treaty can be made to come to life again, perhaps in time celebrate the centenary of when it was last nearly signed? As for strategic arms themselves, a treaty would evidently be a splendid achievement, but it would be even better if these weapons systems came to seem so much an irrelevance that their formal banishment by treaty seemed unnecessary. It will be a great help if those meeting in Moscow next week remember that arms control is not an end in itself, but merely one means to another. □