

Is France going green?

Paris

FOUR years after French government agents sank the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*, the environmental action group is to try again to persuade the French public to back its international campaigns. Greenpeace has opened a new office in Paris with a complete change of staff and a 'softly softly' approach to win back the 20,000 former members who became disaffected after the 1985 affair, which resulted in the death of a Greenpeace photographer.

Meanwhile, the imminent election of delegates to the European Parliament, according to opinion poll-watchers, could see between 10 and 15 per cent of votes go to the new ecology party, mostly at the expense of the political right wing.

The *Rainbow Warrior* affair was not the only reason for the demise of Greenpeace in France, although subscriptions plummeted as a result and the group came to be perceived as anti-French. Between 1985 and 1988, internal squabbles caused a split in the staff, and financial mismanagement left the office with debts of FF2 million (\$306,000). But in January last year, Greenpeace International, which directs the activities of the 20 national agencies, decided to wind up the Paris office and to create another, Greenpeace-France, with a new director and staff. The FF50-million damages paid to Greenpeace International by the French government have meanwhile been used to build a new *Rainbow Warrior*, due to be launched in Hamburg in July.

The future of Greenpeace-France could prove to be a better barometer of French national opinion than the recent success of the ecology party in municipal elections. The political centre is extremely volatile, as was shown in last year's general elections when the balance of power shifted from the extreme right to the extreme left between the two rounds of voting. But the organization's new director, Philippe Lequenne, has no illusions about the difficulty of his task. France has recently clashed again with Greenpeace over the construction of a landing strip in the Antarctic, and last month the prime minister said that France would not ratify a new convention supplementing the Antarctic Treaty (*Nature* 339, 8; 4 May 1989).

A paradox is that support remains for nuclear energy. "French people love technology but hate change", says Lequenne. To make matters more difficult, the former director of Greenpeace in France claims that the company was wound up illegally and is considering taking legal action.

Peter Coles

Money promised for science

London

THE main opposition party to Mrs Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in Britain, the Labour party, promises increased investment in civil research and in higher education if it gains power at the next general election, due in 1992.

In a policy document published last week after a two-year review, science takes high priority. Labour plans the creation of a more scientifically literate population and the construction of a solid basis for future industrial success.

The creation of the post in government of minister for science and technology within the Department of Trade and Industry is central to a new science programme. This minister would be responsible for the distribution of the extra resources for civil research to help science recover from the underfunding of recent years, says Labour. No figures for investment are given; the sum needed is small, it says, but is essential if Britain is not to "run out of both scientists and ideas".

The increasing trend towards concentration of research specialisms in individual universities is welcomed as "inevitable and economically desirable". Centres of excellence should be encouraged, says Labour, but not to the extent that some smaller universities end up doing no research at all.

A new climate in higher education would replace the "turmoil, cuts and demoralization of the Conservative years", to the benefit of all staff, says Labour. Researchers would be offered "good career prospects", and tenure, which was abolished by the government last year, would be reintroduced but made dependent on merit.

In agreement with the present government, Labour would seek to increase significantly the numbers entering higher education, providing financial incentives for institutions to attract not just greater numbers, but more students from a wider range of backgrounds, including women, mature students, those of ethnic origin and those with non-traditional qualifications.

Strongly opposed to the government's planned scheme to replace the maintenance grant with loans, Labour argues that the plan is expensive and limits access and student course choices. Instead, Labour would retain the grant system, review parental contribution and ensure that those who are married or over 21 are treated as independent for grant purposes.

A wide range of new measures would be introduced to encourage industry to increase investment in research. An investment institution, to be called the British Technology Enterprise (BTE), is proposed. Designed to overcome the ob-

session of the City of London with short-term profits, the new institutions would accept a lower rate of return over a longer payback period. The new BTE would resemble the successful National Enterprise Board set up by the last Labour government which produced Celltech, the biotechnology company, and INMOS, the electronics company famous for creation of the transputer. BTE might focus initially on opto-electronics, biotechnology and new materials.

Other plans to encourage industrial investment in research include the simplification of existing government support mechanisms, which Labour says are confusing, *ad hoc* arrangements. It would also use the tax system to encourage greater expenditure on research and to penalize those who spend too little. And to encourage technology transfer between higher education institutions and industry, a regional network of "technology innovation centres" would be set up.

Environmental policy has high priority in Labour's new policy document. The present Conservative government is criticized for focusing on "short-term, single-issue" research projects, revealing "a profound misunderstanding of what scientists do and what scientific knowledge is". Labour promises to support long-term programmes of environmental monitoring and to support basic research with the aim of anticipating environmental problems before they become urgent. Among the priority research areas would be the study of biological processes in the oceans, geophysical processes in the atmosphere and genetically engineered organisms in the environment. A joint research council should be set up to coordinate support for research on the global environment in Britain, and a European environmental charter should be drawn up to encourage cooperative research in Europe. Labour also acknowledges a "compelling obligation to provide the developing countries with environmentally benign technologies.

Labour has toned down its objections to nuclear power, acknowledging that in the medium-term it will remain in use. But it labels the government's promotion of nuclear power in the face of the greenhouse effect "a transparent piece of opportunism", and pledges instead to focus on energy conservation and the development of alternative sources of energy.

It also promises public investment in a "new electronic highway" for Britain, through the construction of a national broad-band fibre-optic cable network. In contrast to the Conservative government, Labour says that as this communications structure would promote economic growth, public investment is necessary.

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