

nuclear power can be cheap is winning adherents.

Last week, however, Lambsdorff did commit himself to one change of policy. Like all Western ministers, he needs to save money during the world recession. Some of it will come from the coal industry — heavily subsidized in Germany to make its price competitive with the imported variety. These subsidies will be reduced, and cheaper coal imported. Germany should also shift away from burning “brown coal”, and use it to provide chemical feedstocks. The missing energy would be provided by nuclear power.

●The German government would not be deflected from its commitment to a DM 10,000 million (£2,400 million) deal with the Soviet Union to provide Western Europe with natural gas through an overland pipeline from Siberia, Lambsdorff said last week. The deal would provide West Germany with around 12,000 million cubic metres a year, 30 per cent of its natural gas requirements. A large fraction of this gas will be used to produce electricity. Natural gas power stations at present produce 50 per cent more electricity in Germany than do nuclear stations.

Robert Walgate

## UK Government Chemist

### New broom

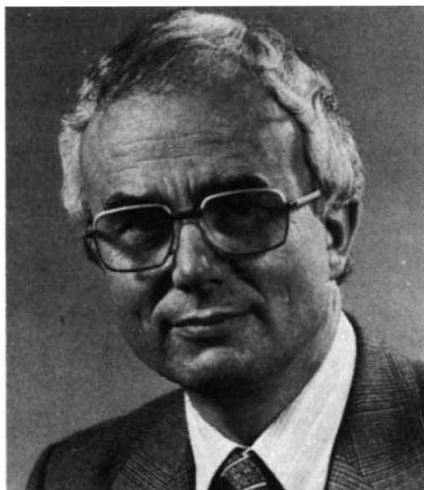
The Laboratory of the Government Chemist, for long a respected but retiring establishment, may yet emerge from the shadows. For Dr Ronald Coleman, who will take over as Government Chemist when Dr Harold Egan retires at the end of December, intends that the laboratory should play a more central part in British science.

The laboratory, which employs about 400 people, provides a wide range of analytical services, mainly for the public sector. Thus it is concerned with the estimation of additives in foods and the characterization of oil-spill samples for correlation with suspected sources of pollution. Although supported by the Department of Industry, the laboratory is paid for specific services by government departments and local authorities. The laboratory has few dealings with the private sector and its research is largely that required to keep abreast of new analytical techniques.

Dr Coleman plans to change all this. He intends to broaden the remit of the laboratory, to make it “more open” and to

### Asian mycotoxins

In the story “Yellow rain: Waiting for data”, *Nature* 22 October p.598, it was mistakenly stated that a sample of vegetation had been taken from Laos for analysis. In fact it was taken from Kampuchea.



Coleman — talking change

forge links with both industry and the universities.

Dr Coleman would like the laboratory to “have a finger in more pies”. In its analytical work he would like the laboratory to branch out into work on surface chemistry and on-line instrumentation. Mr Coleman himself has just been given responsibility for biotechnology in the Biotechnology Directorate set up last month, but the laboratory’s role in this new venture remains to be determined.

Dr Coleman is also ambitiously planning coordinated programmes with industry, hoping that the laboratory could contribute technical expertise and industry the necessary funds. He has already talked to five interested industrial companies.

Dr Coleman points to his varied experience. At present he is deputy director of the National Physical Laboratory, but his career began with five years in the glass industry. His twenty-year spell with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority involved work with nuclear energy, forensic science, geochemistry and biotechnology.

Isobel Collins

## Polish science

### Academy for change

Warsaw

Self-governance, the move towards “social control” of all sectors of public life, will undoubtedly bring considerable changes in the structure of Polish research planning. In particular, there have been vocal demands, coming especially from the scientists’ lobby within the free trade union Solidarity, for parity of status between the universities and other higher educational institutions, the Academy of Sciences and its subsidiary institutes, and the institutes belonging to the production ministries (including the ministries of agriculture, fisheries and mining).

Funding tends to be less generous in the academy institutes than in those belonging to the ministries, many of which, it has been suggested, were founded more for reasons of prestige than for any real

research need. Although with Poland’s newly-admitted unemployment problems — particularly among young graduates — closures are unlikely, a thorough-going reconsideration of the pattern of research is expected. Any moves from the top to start making changes would, however, run the risk of conflicting with the demand — expressed by the recent Solidarity congress — that scientists should have more say in choosing their own research topics.

Another Solidarity recommendation calls for the elimination of the barriers between the academy and the rest of the academic community. During the past few years the various academy institutes have become havens for young academics prevented from taking teaching posts for political reasons, and one of the changes suggested by Solidarity would be to allow scientists working at academy institutes to lecture to university students.

At the same time, there is considerable unrest both inside and outside Solidarity about the present anomalous status of the academy as a quasi-ministry, with its academic secretary responsible not to the academy but directly to the prime minister. A spirited debate, on this and other points, is expected when the general assembly of the academy meets in December, chiefly to debate the proposed new legislation on the academy.

A new bill on higher education is already on its way to becoming law, and (following the protests and strike-threats of last September) it now has the basic consent of the academic community.

Vera Rich

## Californian Medflies

### Brief armistice

Sacramento, California

Aerial spraying against the infestation of the Mediterranean fruit fly, now much curtailed for the duration of what Californians laughably call the winter, is likely to be resumed in earnest in the spring. But Mr Richard Rominger, director of the state Department of Food and Agriculture, told his Advisory Committee on Thursday last week that enough insect traps have been installed in the northern counties for next year’s campaign to be effective.

Meanwhile, fruit farmers in Florida and Texas as well as California are more concerned with an unexpected consequence of the Californian campaign against the Medfly. The practice of fumigating fruit from affected areas of California with ethylene dibromide has raised environmental objections in Japan, one of the chief markets for United States fruit exports, and has also drawn attention to widespread use of ethylene dibromide for fumigating fruit from Florida and Texas (where other pests, such as the Mexican fruit fly, are common). Mr Rominger was hoping, last week, that the Japanese authorities would now accept as safe the Californian requirement that fumigated