

Britain Decides to Stay in CERN

A difficult chapter in the history of the European Laboratory for Nuclear Physics (CERN) came to an end last week when the British government announced that it is lifting its threat to withdraw from the organization. Britain has decided to remain a member following the implementation of administrative and financial reforms aimed at cutting costs and raising cost-effectiveness.

Britain's future annual contribution, at roughly \$82 million a year, will still remain substantially higher than the level recommended by a government-sponsored committee set up in 1984 under the chairmanship of Sir John Kendrew. However, British officials say that the rationalization precipi-

increase from 14 to 17% over this period. Italy, in fact, will replace Britain as CERN's third largest contributor after France and West Germany.

The size of next year's budget contribution has not yet been finally agreed, since the Italian government is still balking at having to make an immediate increase of about \$18 million in its contribution under the new assessment formula. This is based on a combination of gross national product and exchange rate fluctuations. Ironically, the extra bill facing the Italian government is largely the result of a recent decision to include its "black economy" in official estimates of industrial output.

Negotiating a compromise between Britain, which wants the new rules to be introduced next year, and Italy, which is seeking a 1-year delay in their implementation, will be one of the first tasks facing CERN's new director, Carlo Rubbia, when he takes up his post on 1 January. A second challenge facing Rubbia will be finding ways of in-



Herwig Schopper: Britain's decision has removed a "black cloud."

tated both by this committee's report and by the recommendations of a subsequent international review headed by French physicist Anatole Abragam have already achieved much of the increased cost-effectiveness that they had been seeking.

Under a plan adopted by the CERN Council earlier this year, 230 staff members of the laboratory will take early retirement over the next 3 years and the total number of staff will be reduced from the current level of about 3700 to 2950 by 1996. In addition, new rules for calculating the contributions of individual member states will mean that Britain's share of the laboratory's \$625-million annual budget will fall from 16% in the current financial year to about 13% in 2 years' time. In contrast, Italy's share will

creasing the scientific and financial participation in CERN's activities by nonmember states.

Several member states remain upset at what they see as arm-twisting by the British government. However, the news that it will stay in the organization is widely seen among British physicists as bringing to an end a long period of uncertainty about the future, even though their domestic research budgets remain tightly constrained.

"The main reaction is one of relief," says Chris Llewellyn Smith, professor of theoretical physics at the University of Oxford, who was one of the first to point out that Britain had been paying an excessively high contribution to CERN over much of the past decade due to a formula that penalized the country for the artificial strength of the pound during an economic recession.

Herwig Schopper, outgoing CERN director, says he is "very happy" that the administrative and financial changes introduced over the past year have led to Britain's decision to remain a member of CERN. "Psychologically, it is very important for us that this black cloud has disappeared," he says.

■ DAVID DICKSON

U.S.—Soviet Ecology Agreement

Following their meetings in December, officials of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. have announced the formation of a new, high-visibility Interacademy Committee on Global Ecology. NAS president Frank Press, at a joint press conference held at the Academy's Beckman Center in Irvine, California, said the committee will be parallel to the 8-year-old Soviet-American Committee on International Security and Arms Control (CISAC). "We call it the 'green CISAC,'" said Press.

The committee, whose membership has not yet been announced, will "assess global threats to the earth's ecological well-being." Topics will include the greenhouse effect, depletion of stratospheric ozone, species extinction, environmental pollution, exhaustion of natural resources, and the impacts on all this of population growth and industrial development. The committee's "special mission" will be to provide an early warning mechanism for identifying long-range problems and bringing them to the attention of U.S. and Soviet governments.

During the initial phase there will be emphasis on global energy and biochemical cycles; observation systems for assessing global change; changes in biotic diversity; theoretical and methodological bases for understanding global change; and review

and support of related international efforts.

The Soviets at the press conference, Kirill Kondratyev of the Institute of Limnology and Igor Makarov, the Soviet academy's chief scientific secretary, spoke with some fervor about the delicacy of natural cycles and the jeopardy they are in. Kondratyev warned that trends threaten "nothing less than an ecological catastrophe."

The new committee will meet once or twice a year, with the first meeting to be held in the Soviet Union early next year.

It was also announced at the press conference that the Soviet academy has accepted an offer from the NAS to send a team to gather information on the recent earthquake in Soviet Armenia. Sixteen experts on seismology, structural engineering, and emergency planning were scheduled to depart on 19 December, led by seismologist John Fyson of the U.S. Geological Survey and Mikhran Agbabian, chairman of the civil engineering department at the University of Southern California.

Press said the Soviets are especially good at earthquake prediction, having pinpointed this one within 300 kilometers and 5 years. He noted that Americans have not done so well in Southern California, where the probability of a major quake has been estimated at 50% in the next 30 years.

■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN