but because there was such widespread public interest in Laetrile we decided we would go ahead." The FDA has required that the drug be screened first for purity and toxicity—a formality, Kershner said, which may be completed as early as this spring.

Kershner described the formal procedure as a "phase II trial" which will involve 200 to 300 patients in at least four cancer centers: the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Arizona at Tucson, and the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. The volunteers will be cancer patients who have exhausted all conventional means of therapy. They will be given a "metabolic diet" which the NCI has developed in consultation with Laetrile advocates—a vegetarian cuisine supplemented by vitamins and Laetrile. The test will last a year. The drug will be judged efficacious if it succeeds in shrinking the size of tumors by 50 percent or more.

The FDA, which has been battling the claims of Laetrile promoters in the courts for several years, had little to say about its change of policy. However, Commissioner Jere Goyan did issue a terse statement noting that "all the data" suggest Laetrile is ineffective: "I caution cancer patients not to delay or abandon conventional cancer therapies by turning to Laetrile as an alternative."

Engineers Form a New National Association

A new scientific foundation was born on 3 January with the formal inauguration of the American Association of Engineering Societies (AAES) at a dinner in Washington, D.C. The AAES describes itself as an umbrella organization that will shelter more than 35 engineering societies and speak out on occasion for more than one million members. It succeeds the Engineering Joint Council, now defunct after 25 years of operation, and is seen by its creators as being broader and more ambitious than its predecessor. The chairman, founder, and acting president of the AAES is Kenneth Roe, chairman of the engineering firm Burns & Roe.

According to a spokesman, the society will remain for the time being at the United Engineering Center in New York, and will move to Washington when its structure has been more fully developed. Roe envisions a full-time executive staff of 25 to 30, and has described the society as being "like a holding company" for the member societies, which will do the bulk of the AAES's work. The acting executive director is Carl Frey, former director of the Engineering Joint Council. The AAES plans to make its first major decisions on staffing and structure at a meeting to be held from 9 to 12 March at Kiawa Island, South Carolina.

Spokesmen for member societies of the AAES said they hoped that the new organization would overcome the fragmented quality of the engineering community in the past and become a strong voice in Washington on subjects that concern engineers: energy production, government regulation, transfer of technology, and nuclear power.

Western Efficiency Not Welcome in Boston

Some innovations clearly do flow from west to east, as Californians are wont to argue. The latest evidence comes from the bastion of easternism—Massachusetts—the last state in the union to adopt the "western rule" of efficient traffic management.

According to this rule, traffic laws should be designed for the convenience of drivers to the greatest extent possible. Specifically, right turns on red lights should be the rule, not the exception.

On 1 January, Massachusetts became the 50th state to conform to this principle, one which was first applied on a large scale on the West Coast in the 1940's and 1950's. The transition has not been graceful, however. Massachusetts did not join the national trend until after the federal government used its subtle powers of persuasion to goad the state legislature. The Department of Energy informed the state that if it did not authorize right-turn-on-red—as the Energy Act of 1975 required—it stood to lose $1.4 million worth of federal energy-related grants. At that point, the wheels of local government began to turn, and in 1979, the legislature voted to go western in 1980.

In addition to being a time-saver, the western rule is promoted as a modest aid to conservation. A study done by the city of Memphis concluded that the new rule would save about 65,000 gallons of fuel each year, and another study based on traffic in Washington, D.C., concluded that it would make possible an average fuel saving of 2.6 percent for all vehicles. The Federal Highway Administration estimated in 1976 that switching to the western rule at every intersection in the country might save 136 to 187 million gallons of fuel a year—equivalent to one-fifth of the amount of oil consumed in the United States in a day. The same study concluded that accidents arising from right turns made on red lights are statistically insignificant when compared with the total number of intersection accidents. At the most, it said, they amount to 3 percent of the total.

Boston was not won over, however. In carrying out the federal mandate, state and city officials have taken an extremely cautious approach, according to Robert Conner, chief of the traffic control systems division at the Federal Highway Administration. He said the state maintains an "all-pedestrian phase" at 85 percent of its intersections, meaning that traffic coming from every direction is made to halt at pedestrian crosswalks. Boston simply put no-right-turn-on-red signs at every one of these intersections. Thus, it cost the state about $360,000 to buy 11,500 no-turn signs, which now alert citizens to the fact that the western rule does not apply at most of the intersections in Massachusetts. Washington, D.C., and Connecticut have made a similar accommodation with the western rule. They typically prohibit right-turn-on-red at 80 percent or more of the intersections, the reverse of the progressive western pattern, Conner said. Los Angeles prohibits right turns at only 1 percent of its intersections; Dallas, at 9 percent; and Denver, at 7 percent.

With Boston's conversion, all the big cities have adjusted to the new style, except one: New York. Its thousands of intersections are still bound by eastern customs, and there is no plan to liberate them.

Eliot Marshall