

slight acceleration in growth (a 16% increase for the process of aid to development). This research budget, the first of M. Giscard d'Estaing's seven years' term gives some indication of a trend but it does not constitute in itself a scientific policy. The reorientation of research efforts in relation to new priorities implies structural reforms. On this level, major decisions are still being studied. A reorganisation of the Ministry of Industry and Research and of the DGRST could take place in the autumn. The only measure taken in this regard during the summer was to connect the "Delegation à l'informatique" which oversees the "Plan Calcul" for computers to a new Department of Electronic Industries and Computing within the Ministry. But, at present, the new government's most important innovation is the creation of a Secretariat of State to the Universities who is completely autonomous and oversees the universities and the CNRS, thus restricting the power of the Ministry of National Education to elementary and secondary schools. This secretary is expected to outline a policy for university research which the former Ministry of National Education never really concentrated upon. Only during the next few months will one really be able to judge the objectives that the new government intends to pursue in scientific policy. □

Business: problems for Ferranti

from Roger Woodham

ANOTHER British company, the electrical and electronics group Ferranti which makes a wide range of things from naval and aviation electronic equipment to the humble electricity meter, is short of cash. Looking for a way out, assuming it continues to grow, it is considering a sale.

Ferranti's sales in 1973 were £1,000 million by value, £500 million by volume. It is a plausible assumption that the company will be able to raise £500 million by selling its assets.

An interesting case in itself, Ferranti's work is inextricably linked with European defence. Sales last year were worth £72 million, £52 million of that in the British market with 40% being accounted for by defence contracts with the British government. Many of its exports go to Europe but the company describes the destinations of its foreign sales as "traditionally erratic", citing a large one-off contract to supply equipment

to the Brazilian navy last year as an example. In spite of all this, profits have been hard to come by in recent years, for the company as a whole at least; a profit of £3 million in 1967 turned gradually into a loss of £900,000 in 1971 and the accounts are still in the red after two years of improvement.

The development budget—Ferranti says it does no "research" in the accepted sense—runs at £15 million a year, about a third of which is for governments. The company declines to say how many of its workforce of 9,000 are involved in development work, but a correlation of money and "cost" could be commercially embarrassing.

The future for Ferranti in the longer term will depend to some extent on who wins the general election. The present government has several options:

- To buy a stake in the company, thus wresting control from the Ferranti family.
- To bring in an outside organisation to manage the whole concern.
- To provide, as part of a more wide ranging industrial policy, some form of financing for the medium term.
- To persuade the company to sell off parts of itself in order to create a more viable unit. There are several precedents, for example, the sale of Ferranti computer interests to what is now the computer company ICL in the 1960s. □

AMERICA'S first scientifically-based Center for UFO Studies, established by J. Allen Hynek (right) after a wave of UFO reports across the States last year, is planning to ask the National Science Foundation and NASA for funds in the near future. The Center, a loose affiliation of scientists from a dozen US universities, is currently funded by private donations, but feels that its stock in trade—scientific credibility—stands sufficiently high for approaches to be made to establishment bodies like NSF and NASA.

Hynek, professor of astronomy at Northwestern University, Illinois, and author of the best-selling *The UFO Experience*, has been interested in unidentified flying objects for years, and has developed contacts with what he calls the "invisible college" of qualified scientists who believe the UFO phenomenon to be worthy of investigation. In correspondence they agreed that it was time to set up a Center to provide reliable UFO information and to collect reports of events for investigation.

Hynek rented the services of a toll-free telephone switchboard that is manned round the clock, seven days a week, and distributed its number to police throughout the United States. UFO reports on this hot line average



about one a day (or night). Depending on their importance, cases are followed up in person or by a questionnaire.

The scientists of the Center are preparing a report on the 1973 UFO wave in which 1,500 cases are listed. The sightings started in the south-eastern states and, in Hynek's words, "spread along the river valleys". When published next spring, the report will be a valuable study of a major UFO event.

Hynek's work has started a steady shift in public and scientific attitudes to UFOs which are documented in a revealing hour-long TV programme being screened coast-to-coast in December by NBC. "I think the programme's

impact will be considerable," says Hynek. "When the next wave occurs the Center will be there to serve."

Hynek is impressed by the fact that the nature of the phenomenon itself is the one thing that has not changed. "The typical UFO report today is essentially the same as it was 10 years ago," he says. Yet he carefully points out that he does not support the idea that UFOs are nuts-and-bolts spacecraft from other worlds: "There are too many things against it. It seems ridiculous that any intelligence would come from such great distances to do reportedly stupid things like stopping cars and frightening people. And there are far, far too many reports."

For Hynek and the members of his "invisible college" there remains no doubt that the UFO phenomenon is real. But its explanation? He draws a parallel with early attempts at explaining what makes the Sun shine, which faltered through lack of knowledge of physics. Currently, all the UFO Center can do is to define the limits of the problem. Says Hynek: "We're setting down the things that any hypothesis will have to explain." And, returning to the conclusion of *The UFO Experience*, he adds: "When the solution does come, it's going to be one hell of a quantum jump." IAN RIDPATH