NOTES

together with one of the lawyers, to be arrested. They are now awaiting trial on charges of 'perjury' and 'adulteration of evidence'. Protests from the other lawyers led to their expulsion from the court

PLO's rejectionism

lan Black writes from Jerusalem: Several influential political figures in the West Bank have expressed deep concern over reports that Palestine Liberation Organisation official Issam Sartawi may lose his job after accepting a human rights prize together with a leading Israeli dove. They include a number of mayors and prominent intellectuals, whose loyalty to the PLO is unquestionable and who believe that punishing Sartawi, the PLO's representative in Europe and a senior member of Yasser Arafat's Al-Fatah group, would discourage further dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

Two months ago Sartawi shared a \$24,000 award from Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky together with Arve Eliav. a former leader of the left-wing Sheli party, for their efforts in seeking common ground between the PLO and Israelis. Recent reports from Beirut have said that Sartawi's membership of the Palestine National Council - the PLO's 'parliament' - may be suspended pending an investigation into his acceptance of the prize with Eliav. Moderate Palestinians in the occupied territories have expressed serious concern about these reports, arguing that any such punishment would have serious implications for future PLO dialogue with those few Israelis who are prepared to support the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

The calls for punishment for Sartawi appear to be emanating from Palestinian rejectionist and leftwing groups angered by the success of his recent diplomatic offensive in Western Europe - which bought Arafat closer than ever to genuine recognition - and by his pro-American orientation. Sartawi proved sufficiently versatile, with Kreisky's help, to and himself on the same aeroplane as Milton Wolff. Washington's ambassador in Vienna - one of the hidden facts about the PLO-American connection. which came tumbling out after the Andrew Young affair. Both he and Arafat have come under fire from the rejectionists in the past, but what is worrying this time is that it was Salah Khalaf (Abu lyad). Arafat's number two in Fatah and a member of the PLO's executive committee, who announced that Sartawi would stand trial. And, as one informed observer commented this week: 'When these people put someone on trial they don't intend to acquit him.

West Bank concern over the affair reflects not only a sense of political reality apparently acquired by proximity to the Israeli left, but also anger that the PLO's most valuable diplomatic operator should fall victim to the rejectionist line (clearly welcomed by the Eastern bloc) that opposes Westcrn European or American involvement in the search for a solution to the Palestinian problem.

Will UMIST close?

Jim Wilson writes: If the Government persists with its plan to increase foreign student fees then the casualties will include not just thousands of foreign students but one or two British universities as well. And top of the threatened list is the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) where one-third of all students are from abroad. 'We can't cope with economies of this kind. If the Government continues to push us we could fall flat on our faces and that will mean bankruptcy,' warns Professor Robert Haszeldine, Principal of UMIST. Thope, and I'm sure it will never come to a question of closure but that is the direction the government is pushing us,' he adds grimly.

The arithmetic is simple. The government has told the University Grants Committee to reduce its allocation to the universities by 13 per cent next year (on the arbitrary assumption that 13 per cent of students are from overseas) and has recommended new fees for overseas students rising from the present £940 for undergraduates and £1,230 for postgraduates to £2,000 for arts courses, £3,000 for science and £5,000 for medicine. But at UMIST, with 32 per cent of the student population from overseas, the university estimates it will have to charge £3,800 next year if it is to survive.

'Our evidence,' claims Professor Haszeldine, 'is that only between 50 to 70 per cent of foreign students will be able to afford to return next year'. And it is that subsequent drop in income which worries the university most. To put it bluntly: if UMIST loses one-third of its income it is bankrupt. Only half of UMIST's foreign students are financed by Government: the rest are self-supporting. While some governments will gladly pay out the higher charges, others will reluctantly look to West Germany and the Soviet Union where fees are substantially lower. Indeed British fees will soon be among the highest in the world.

Most of UMIST's foreign students are already feeling the pinch after this year's 40 per cent increase in fees. 'Remember,' one student pointed out, 'our visas don't even allow us to supplement our grant by working. And while there are many wealthy students here there are also a great many on the bread-line.' 'The proposals have not been clearly thought out.' argues Professor Haszeldine, explaining that British industry which last year gave £2.5m to UMIST derives a great deal of benefit from the high level of research carried out at the university – much of it done by foreign students.

Policing the radio

Denis MacShane writes from Geneva: After 74 days of talks the World Administrative Radio Conference has fizzled out with a remarkable reaffirmation of the status quo as perceived by the US and Russia. Held only every 20 years, the conference successfully dodged major problems of international radio communication thrown up since 1959: the role of satellites, the expansion of local radio stations and direct one-to-one radio communications.

The Soviet Union successfully managed to stave off an effective regulation and policing of high frequency – shortwave – bands. Officially Russian external broadcasts should stick to pre-ordained wavebands given to Russia following international agreement. What, in fact, the Russians do is hunt the wavebands allocated to individual third world countries, searching for a frequency that is not being used, and then shunt their propagarda output onto that waveband. This breaks all the international rules but was unchallenged in Geneva.

The US secured protection against any substantial expansion of high frequency bands used inside countries for fixed-point transmission. Fixed-point short-wave transmission is effectively a telephone system operating on radio waves. It was cumbersome and expensive until the recent developments in miniaturisation and lowering of prices which now mean that for a poor country it is probably cheaper to install a fixed-point HF system as the national system of voice-to-voice communication. That goes against the desires and profits of the giant telecommunications multinationals like ITT.

The most disturbing omission from the WARC agenda is the question of the potential explosion in radio communication that micro-technology now allows to take place. As 2,000 pirate – though legal – radio stations in Italy have shown, it is now easier and cheaper to communicate with people by radio than through traditional print means. In France, the Socialist Party and the French unions have started operating pirate – and illegal – radio stations, the unions opening them for the duration of major strikes. All this was unmentioned in Geneva where the governments of East Europe, third world and western countries have a common interest in keeping the people's hand off the radio dial.

More Labour women

Frances Morrell writes: Another step has been taken in the campaign to get more women MPs and more genuine women's representation on the Labour Party's national executive. If all goes according to plan, next year's Labour Party conference will be debating the mandatory inclusion of a woman and a manual worker in all short lists of candidates interviewed by local party selection conferences.

At their annual general meeting last week the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy decided to back this idea and also to campaign for the NEC's women section to be elected by the Labour Party Women's Conference, instead of by the maledominated national conference.

It has taken three years to get the CLPD to adopt a policy of positive discrimination and even this year, despite overwhelming support from the AGM, it only just scraped past the CLPD executive.

The key to successfully selling the idea in the party as a whole is the linking together of manual workers and women. This will make it much easier to get the support of trades unions and the constituency parties, who will now be systematically canvassed to back the proposals when submitted to next year's conference, in the hope that the appropriate constitutional change can be made in 1981. If the NEC decided to support the proposals the changes could be made in 1980, ensuring that the wave of selection conferences triggered by mandatory reselection would be subject to positive discrimination rules.

Powerful opposition to these proposals can be expected from Joyce Gould, Labour's deputy national agent, whose view that women should compete with men on merit alone commanded widespread support at last year's Labour Party Women's Conference.

Meanwhile at Congress House, the 41-strong General Council is deliberating on a demand from its own Women's Advisory Committee that the number of women in its ranks should be increased from 2 to 7. It appears to be unsympathetic.

Repressing mathematics

Duncan Campbell writes: The activities of British and American intelligence agencies now extend to attacking academic freedom. The US National Security Agency has been waging a quiet campaign to get publication of some independent mathematical research restricted on grounds of 'national security'. They are imminently expected to introduce amendments into a new US law on controlling exports, presently known HR4074, which would prohibit the distribution overseas of certain kinds of mathematical research.

The attack is motivated by the desire of NSA to make their job of reading coded messages as simple as possible. Since the end of the second world war, a giant Anglo-American partnership has carried out massive and costly espionage on everyone else's secret messages, a process called signals intelligence – 'sigint' (NS 2 February). But the new sophistication of microelectronics coupled with recent remarkable mathematical advances threaten to make many communications too expensive to unscramble.

Some researchers are developing ways of sending data using more conventional codes and, in public, trying ways of breaking codes by sophisticated computer techniques to test their security. NSA wishes a plague on all their houses; earlier this year the NSA's director. Rear Admiral Bobby Inman, avowed his desire for legislation to control research and publications of a 'central core of critical cryptologic information . . that is likely to have a discernable adverse impact on national security'.

Since Inman's speech, according to Professor Ronald Rivest of MIT, agency officials have been quietly taking soundings on what NSA could get away with. To date, there have been attempts to make profitable patents secret, to curb grant awards in areas of mathematics connected to cryptography, and a notorious letter threatening academics with prosecution for publishing their research.