Soviet psychiatric abuse

Allegations met by red tape

The Soviet All-Union Society of Psychiatrists (AUSP) has adopted a new approach to accusations by human rights groups about the confinement and "treatment" of dissidents in Soviet mental hospitals. Instead of rejecting all such allegations out of hand, it has supplied the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) with details of two alleged cases and has promised information on four more.

The fact that the data appear incomplete, and the extreme slowness with which they have been made available, have evoked considerable suspicion among some members of WPA. Is this a genuine change of heart or simply a delaying tactic on the part of the Soviet Union to forestall moves by several member bodies — including the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the American Psychiatric Association — to have AUSP expelled or suspended from WPA?

This is not the first time that AUSP has professed itself willing to cooperate with WPA over allegations of psychiatric abuse. During the last world congress, in Honolulu in 1977, the Soviet delegate to the general assembly handed round a substantial document containing "confidential" clinical data on twelve dissidents whose cases had frequently been cited as "alleged victims of psychiatric abuse", in the hope of convincing the delegates that the dissidents were in fact suffering from severe psychoses. The Honolulu congress narrowly passed a motion of censure against the Soviet Union, and set up a special review committee to monitor allegations of political use of psychiatry.

AUSP, however, has never acknowledged the competence of this review committee, and the executive committee has had to assume much of the responsibility for investigating allegations involving the Soviet Union. The work of the review committee so far was presented at an executive council meeting in Marrakesh earlier this month in a special report by the secretary general, Professor Peter Exner, which was reportedly condemned by the Soviet observer Professor Marat Vartanyan as being "too negative". For those member societies that have submitted allegations of psychiatric abuse to WPA, follow-up of the original complaint is hindered by what the complainants see as an unreasonable insistence on professional confidentiality.

Whether this strict insistence on professional ethics is a result of Soviet pressure is not clear. Ironically, in many cases, the complaints have been originated by the victims themselves asking to have the diagnoses made public, in order to reveal their dubious medical basis. There are growing fears among member societies of WPA that the executive council's over-

scrupulous stance on confidentiality may unwittingly be going against the interests of other individuals whose cases are under review.

Vera Rich

Romanian emigrants

Cash demands

A decree promulgated earlier this month by the Romanian Council of Ministers seems certain to hamper the movement abroad of Romanian scientists. The decree requires that Romanian emigrants should repay (in hard currency) the costs of their secondary and higher education.

The decree is reminiscent of that in the Soviet Union some ten years ago designed to recover higher education fees from Jews wishing to emigrate to Israel. The Soviet ruling evoked widespread protests abroad, including the imposition of credit restrictions by the United States, and was allowed to lapse less than a year later.

The Romanian decree is likely to attract even more vehement criticism. Already the US State Department has called it a "draconian measure", contrary to the letter and spirit of the Helsinki accords, and has hinted that it could hamper the renewal, next year, of Romania's recently acquired "most favoured nation" status.

The condition that higher education costs, however calculated, should be repaid in hard currency, will be virtually impossible to satisfy. (It is illegal for Romanian citizens to have hard currency in their possession.) The most probable objective of the decree is to clamp down on emigration, a conclusion borne out by the reports from Bonn that the Romanian government has given notice to end the agreement under which up to 10,000 Romanians of German origin are allowed to emigrate each year.

The effects of the new decree, moreover,

EEC research council

Cash injections planned

Brussels

Despite the row over the budget for Super-Sara, the project for investigating what happens when light-water reactors lose coolant (see *Nature* 11 November, p.99), the November meeting of the EEC science ministers approved a near-record number of research programmes. With one or two minor reservations the pilot stage of the Esprit programme on long-range research on information technologies (see *Nature* 3 June, p.352), the 4-year indirect action programme in favour of developing countries, a programme for the development of a translation machine and finally the experimental phase of the project to stimulate the European

are liable to be felt in all countries that have scientific exchange programmes with Romania. The decree, for example, lays down that a scholar allowed to travel to an international conference who fails to return on schedule will be treated as an illegal emigrant, and will be sued for the cost of his or her education both at home (presumably with the confiscation of assets) and in the new country of residence. The relevant clause of the decree is phrased ambiguously, and could be construed to apply retroactively to those who have left the country in recent years, especially since the mid-1970s.

Vera Rich

British Astronomer Royal

Professor F. Graham Smith, now the director of the Nuffield radio-astronomy observatory of the University of Manchester at Jodrell Bank and until earlier this year director of the Royal Greenwich Observatory, was this week appointed Astronomer Royal of England. He succeeds Sir Martin Ryle, who resigned the post as from October. One of the ironies of the new appointment is that Sir Martin's appointment as Astronomer Royal was intended to mark a separation of that post from the directorship of the Greenwich Observatory.

Community's scientific and technical potential were all given the green light.

The programme to stimulate science and technology is to last 2 years and will have a budget of 7 million European Currency Units (£3.7 million), an increase of 40 per cent over the amount originally demanded. Before the programme can be implemented, however, the European Parliament must be given time to express an opinion and a formal proposal must be made by the Commission.

The money will be used to test out the Commission's plans to operate a new fund which it can invest rapidly in any projects considered promising without having to resort to the usual cumbersome system of

elaborating formal programmes. The experimental phase will test out this concept in seven areas which are considered important and in need of "stimulation" — pharmacobiology, solid state physics, optics, combustion, photometry, photoacoustics, interface phenomena and climatology.

Under the new system, a consultative committee (CODEST) made up of outstanding authorities in science and technology will advise the Commission on how to spend the money. Applications for research grants, subsidies for laboratory twinning, development contracts, subsidies for research teams, seminars and workshops will all be considered.

If the experimental phase is successful, the scheme will be extended for the years 1984–87 and a figure — perhaps as much as £12 million, or 5 per cent of the Community's joint annual research expenditure, will be set aside each year.

The scheme was first agreed in principle at the last Council on 30 June, as was the Esprit programme, for which a pilot stage was agreed by the November Council, with 11.5 million ECU (£6 million) available from the EEC budget. Universities and companies will be expected to contribute at least 50 per cent of the cost if they seek support in carrying out research. Money has been set aside for pilot projects in advanced electronics (two projects), software technology (three), advanced information processing (three), office automation (four), computer integrated manufacturing (three), and information exchange systems. Each contract must contain at least one industrial participant.

A 5-year programme budgeted at 16 million ECU (£8.5 million) will now also start, aimed at building an advanced translation machine to "extend the frontiers of computational linguistics". The advantages of such a machine are evident when one considers that about a third of the 16,000 EEC civil servants are currently involved in translating or interpreting the seven Community languages.

And for the first time, the EEC will have a joint research programme in aid of developing countries (see *Nature* 15 July, p. 218); 40 million ECU (£21 million) will be spent on two sub-programmes between 1982 and 1986: tropical agriculture and medicine, health and nutrition in the tropics. The programme has raised doubts in the minds of some delegations and at the European Parliament, since despite its title the programme will mostly benefit laboratories in the EEC rather than directly helping developing countries. However, the agreement to have the programme at all is an important step towards realizing the ambition of Viscount Etienne Davignon, European Commissioner with responsibility for research and development, to make work dedicated to assisting the developing world one of the seven pillars of the EEC's research and development strategy for the 1980s. **Jasper Becker**

French research and development

Can the good times last?

France's foreign debt is now estimated to be FF 300,000 million (£25,000 million), double the figure of a year ago, and the balance of trade deficit was running at FF 12,000 million (£1,000 million) a month in September. But still France continues to promise to spend, spend, spend on research and development. Earlier this month the National Assembly voted the government civil research budget for 1983: it will be FF 52,200 million (£4,300 million), 28 per cent up in money terms over 1982, and 17.8 per cent up in real terms. This is not a jot different from that previewed in the July "law for research" but the economic problems are raising fears that the figures will prove, in the end, a mere façade.

For instance, this year the finance minister ordered a freeze on government spending which — so far as science was concerned — held back a quarter of the planned budget for new research equipment. Caught unawares, laboratories which had already made orders found themselves falling rapidly into the red — until the minister of research and industry was able to claw back the 25 per cent just a

few weeks ago. Other ministries, such as the ministry of national education, were not so successful. There is talk next year of a freeze of 30 per cent. Will the research minister claw that back too? Some doubt it, despite the fact that in France, research and technology appear to have become the new faith.

Nevertheless the budget figures are worth analysing as indicators of intention. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the research and industry minister, plans to cut his cake of FF 52,200 million (£4,300 million) for 1983 into FF 32.5 million for civil research and development, and FF 19.7 million in support of his industrial and energy policy.

The research budget proper — money for the research councils — will be up 17 per cent to FF 23,500 million. The figure includes many salaries. There will also be fiscal support to companies undertaking more research (in particular a rather backhanded relief from a new "tax on fortunes"). This and other measures are intended to help industry boost its own research budget by 8 per cent next year, as envisaged in Chevènement's grand plan.

Basic science is not the principal beneficiary of the increases, although it is not neglected. The French government's fundamental objective is the renewal of industry through long-sighted, government-managed investment. So the greatest increase — 62 per cent — within the FF 32.5 million goes to Chevènement's seven "*programmes mobilisateurs*", which cover new energies, electronics, biotechnology, research and innovation for the Third World, research on the conditions of labour, the promotion of the French language in science and technology, and general support for industrial innovation. These are the workhorses of Chevènement's policy, although nobody seems sure exactly how the cash will be harnessed to research. **Robert Walgate**

French civil research and development budget (thousand million FF)

	Budget		Increase (per cent)
	1982	1983	
"Programmes mobilisateurs"	5.3	8.6	62
Applied research	3.7	4.5	22
Technology programmes (nuclear, aerospace and oceans)	6.6	8.1	23
Other	5.1	5.5	8
Total government civil research and development	25.4	32.5	28

FF 11.75 = £1. Amounts are in current francs; inflation cuts increases by about 10 per cent.

Direct support for French scientists and the research organizations (thousand million FF)

	Budget		Increase (per cent)
	1982	1983	
Direct ministerial support	1.16	1.49	28
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique	5.95	6.94	17
Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique	5.26	5.85	11
CNES (space)	2.15	2.74	27
INRA (agriculture)	1.51	1.74	15
INSERM (medical)	1.04	1.25	21
ANVAR (transfer of research to industry)	0.83	0.99	19
ORSTOM + GERDAT (Third World)	0.76	0.89	17
ADI + INRIA (informatics)	0.44	0.48	9
CNEXO (oceans)	0.40	0.49	22
AFME (new energies)	0.30	0.39	30
Institut Pasteur (Paris)	0.14	0.17	21
Other	0.11	0.12	10
Total	20.05	23.54	17