

in the Republic of Ireland in preparation for any new threat that may arise from the new oil installations there. There has also been a series of field and laboratory experiments in association with University College, Swansea, and a successful symposium on the biological effects of oil pollution on littoral communities was held at the centre in February 1968.

HISTORY OF SCIENCE

Demise of a Department

THE professorial committee of University College London on Tuesday gave a temporary reprieve to the college's History and Philosophy of Science Department. The committee failed to reach agreement on the recommendation of a sub-committee that the department should be closed. Instead it deferred the decision to another meeting. The news will no doubt be taken as a sign of encouragement by those who believe that the history and philosophy of science should be a rapidly expanding discipline in its own right. The failure of the professorial committee to reach agreement must mean that there is in the college a strong lobby opposed to the recommendation to close the oldest department in the discipline in Britain, and the only department in London University which teaches both the history and the philosophy of science in an integrated fashion.

Lord Annan, the provost of University College, said that there had never been enthusiasm for the recommendation but, he said, the financial squeeze will force the college to cut the number of senior staff. Lord Annan explained that the University Grants Committee has been pressing London University as a whole, and University College in particular, to reduce the proportion of senior staff to 35 per cent of the total. At University College the proportion is 45 per cent, and Lord Annan says he has been told that if this proportion is not reduced by at least 2 per cent in this quinquennium, there can be no further promotions in any department. Cutting out the history and philosophy of science would reduce the establishment by one professor, a reader, a lecturer and an assistant lecturer and eventually a second readership would lapse. It would also free a house in Gordon Square.

The response of specialists at other British universities to the possibility of the closure seems to be one of astonishment, disappointment and dismay. It is held that University College has made no effort to make known and discuss the matter. The closure would also mean the removal of a valuable educational option for London University students. Professionals argue, of course, that the history and philosophy of science provides a unique meeting ground for the arts and sciences and gives science students a taste for discursive argument as well as a feeling for the place of science in social history and the history of ideas—the kind of education which the Swann report championed.

Lord Annan says in reply that should the closure be deemed necessary UCL will investigate how much history and philosophy of science can be taught by staff in other departments. They may be able to take over much of the work. And there would still be two readers and a lecturer interested in the history of science, while the philosophy department includes

Professor P. Feyerabend—a philosopher of science who commutes between UCL and Berkeley. Lord Annan also says that with the new course unit system—similar to the credit system of American universities—now in operation, students at University College have the option of more than half a dozen courses ranging from history to psychology.

One of the reasons why University College can seriously discuss the closing of the department is that since 1923 it has never really tried to teach undergraduates. Its one attempt, a course in the history of science for historians, had a hopelessly large syllabus and was a failure. The teaching in the department has been at the postgraduate level, usually with a dozen or so part-time students reading for an MSc. The department can point to a handful of its students who are now lecturers at other universities, and it has no doubt broadened the horizons of many school teachers, but it can hardly claim to have had any real impact on undergraduate teaching in the college. Its critics say that it has not tackled the problem of recruiting large numbers of science undergraduates. A stronger department would have a better case for survival, and who can deny that a professor, two readers and some lecturers should do more than teach a dozen part-time students and the occasional PhD candidate?

Perhaps the real question is why University College has allowed the department to run down in this way. Ever since Professor Herbert Dingle retired in 1955, the college seems to have been in two minds about the value of the department and seems to have done little to encourage expansion. For two years after Professor Dingle left, no successor was appointed; it apparently took the college that long to decide to appoint to the chair Dr Douglas McKie, who had been in the department for years and anyway was close to retirement. When he retired in 1963, the department languished for four years without a chairman, and then the acting head, Dr J. S. Wilkie, was appointed to the chair in 1967. He could well be the last professor and, as he says with hindsight, the discussions about whether to carry on which took place when Professor McKie retired were a taste of things to come. Once again on Tuesday the college showed its inability to make up its mind.

LITERATURE

Reproductive Newsletter

A NEWSLETTER covering new developments in reproductive physiology and intended to interest doctors of medicine as well as the general reader has been launched by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF, 18 Lower Regent Street, London SW1). *Research in Reproduction* will appear quarterly, in alternation with the IPPF's *Medical Bulletin*; it is edited by R. G. Edwards at the Physiological Laboratory, Cambridge.

In the first issue R. L. Brinster reviews the metabolism of the mammalian embryo before implantation, and there is a note on recent cases of immunological reactions against semen (surprisingly in a virgin after her first intercourse) and against cells in the ovary. Other items include notices of new journals and societies in the field and an account of the *Bibliography of Reproduction*. The IPPF hopes that the newsletter