

the science vote of the Department of Education and Science — may tell. He is reluctant to challenge the Rothschild principle, to which he still adheres firmly — while recognizing the dangers of multi-customer arrangements. He and his staff will redouble their efforts to get new contracts for support for projects in Third World countries. **Robert Walgate**

## London university

### Medical schools stay

Two of the medical school of the University of London, whose survival has been in doubt since March this year, were reprieved last Wednesday (29 October) by a resolution of the university Senate. The decision is regarded, within the university, as a sign that the more far-reaching inquiry into the organization of the university as a whole now under way will be less radical than some have feared.

The two medical schools concerned are Westminster Hospital Medical School and King's College Hospital Medical School (which includes a pre-clinical school at King's College proper and a clinical school at King's College Hospital, in south-east London). The disbandment of the two schools was recommended to the university in March by the report on medical teaching in the university prepared by a committee under Lord Flowers, rector of Imperial College.

The politics of last week's narrow Senate decision have a particular interest for the future reorganization of the University of London. The resolution eventually adopted by the Senate was proposed by Dr Bryan Thwaites, principal of Westfield College, one of the smaller institutions of the university. Thwaites and the others supporting the resolution argued that the university should not attempt to coerce constituent academic institutions into courses of action they found unpalatable.

This line of argument has an obvious bearing on the general inquiry into the organization of the university being conducted by a committee under Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer and set up by the vice-chancellor, Lord Annan, earlier this year. One possible outcome of that inquiry is a recommendation that the smaller institutions within the university might be merged with larger college or with each other. If however the principle of self-determination has been established, proposals involving loss of independence are less likely to be seriously put forward.

The battle over the independence of the two medical schools is not yet over. Although the decision may in principle be overturned by the Court of the university, this is unlikely without further consideration. A more likely course is that the Academic Planning Board, to which the issue has been referred, will come to a different decision from that of the Senate last week.

## Séveso scare

### Bloat, not poison

A flurry of fear last week that dioxin had reared its head again at Séveso has quickly abated. The local community was alarmed when 150 sheep died after spending a single night on a forbidden field, out of bounds to grazing animals for the past four years. The dead sheep were part of a flock of 250 driven 50 miles from the dry uplands of northern Italy.

First thoughts had blamed dioxin. The field was one of the most exposed when a chemical factory exploded at Séveso in 1976, distributing dioxin over the neighbourhood, and it had not yet been cleared for farming. (The shepherds say they did not see the notices.) But the sheep died too quickly for dioxin poisoning, and the levels in the field are now thought to be quite low. In fact the Séveso special office, headed by Senator Luigi Noé, was planning shortly to open nearby fields for cereal growing, but these plans were halted after the death of the sheep.

IMAGE  
UNAVAILABLE  
FOR  
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REASONS

*Dead sheep, dead landscape*

However, the necropsies now show that the sheep died of bloat — severely distended gut, caused by the over rapid fermentation of wet hay, rye and grass in the stomachs of the hungry animals.

The result has been backed up by analysis of the livers of the dead sheep at the Mario Negri pharmacological research institute in Milan, which first detected dioxin in Séveso goats during 1976. According to Dr Luciano Manara, head of

the drug metabolism laboratory at the institute, the sheep had liver dioxin levels below 1 ng per g — compared with 1 µg per g in the most exposed goats in 1976.

Senator Noé has declared himself satisfied with these results, and has restarted the plans to open the Séveso fields. **Robert Walgate**

## Bovine tuberculosis

### Badgers at risk

Tuberculous badgers are more of a threat to themselves than to the cattle they infect. This is the nub of Lord Zuckerman's report on the British practice of gassing badgers, suspended a year ago after protests from conservationists (see *Nature* 28 October). Immediately after the publication of his report, *Badgers, cattle and tuberculosis* (HMSO, £5.20), the Secretary of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced that the practice of gassing infected badger setts is to be resumed as soon as possible and then reviewed after a three-year trial period.

Bovine tuberculosis is most common in south-west England, chiefly in the counties of Avon and Cornwall. The British badger population is to some extent concentrated in southern England, but the agriculture of the eastern counties is more concerned with cultivation than with cattle-rearing.

Evidence in the Zuckerman report for the association between bovine and badger tuberculosis is largely circumstantial. The incidence of bovine tuberculosis is correlated with that of badger tuberculosis and with the density of the badger population. There is also evidence that transmission from one species to the other is feasible. In Britain, the association (long suspected) became the basis for official policy on badger control only in 1971, after experience in New Zealand suggested that opossums were there a feral reservoir for bovine tuberculosis.

The issue has been contentious in Britain for the past decade. The Badger Act of 1973 gave badgers specific protection over and above the provisions of the Protection of Animals Act of 1911, but the Ministry of Agriculture was given power to control badgers (and even to enter farmers' land for that purpose) by later legislation in 1975 and 1976.

The causative organism of bovine tuberculosis, *Mycobacterium bovis*, is the chief cause of tuberculosis in badgers. The most arresting data in the Zuckerman report are those for the incidence of *M. bovis* infection in badgers. The most extensive series of measurements is that carried out by ministry laboratories of badger carcasses submitted for autopsy, usually after being killed on roads. In south-west England, more than 4 per cent of adventitious carcasses yielded *M. bovis*, while elsewhere in Britain isolation of the bacillus from dead badgers was sporadic and not statistically significant. In another

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