

French universities

Government makes only token concessions to Right

WITH most French students now sitting examinations in preference to demonstrating on the streets, debate on the government's new bill to reform higher education was a little more ordered last week — but only a little. The National Assembly is discussing the bill clause by clause, but at the pace of an *escargot*, because of the enormous number of amendments tabled by the opposition: some 1,950. This is more than the number faced even by the hotly argued nationalization bill or any other bill prepared under M. Mitterrand's presidency. There are sub-amendments to sub-amendments which add little substance to the argument of the amendment. The first clause (of 68 in the bill) took nearly eight hours to be approved, and there are projections that parliament will need a special session in July to see the bill through just the lower house of parliament, while other important legislation remains undebated. The opposition parties are being accused of filibustering, sabotage and devaluing democracy. Clearly, they sense the kill. De Gaulle fell after the university rebellion of spring 1968; will Mitterrand go the same way? The Right hopes so.

However, M. Alain Savary, the minister for education, is doggedly resisting all attacks, and yielding only a small amount of ground. Ultimately, most of the amendments proposed by the opposition are being rejected, and something very similar to the minister's first intentions is emerging from the mill.

Except, that is, on one point. Savary wanted greater control of the *grandes écoles*, the engineering schools which seem unfailingly to train the elite of the civil service, government and industry. Most of these schools belong to other ministries: the Ecole Polytechnique, for example, arguably top of the heap, is controlled by the ministry of defence. Article 9 of the bill indicated that rules developed for institutions under Savary's direct control — such as universities — could be extended "by decree" to other institutions. The *grandes écoles* and the Right objected, and Savary bowed: any extension of the rules would be made only with the "good advice" of the schools themselves and of their ministries, he said. This gave a "minimum guarantee", the opposition felt, and Article 9 was thus amended. So the bill, although nominally about the whole of higher education, becomes predominantly one about universities.

On most other matters, however, the government has won the day. Universities will be run not just by two councils, as at present (administrative and scientific) but, as the bill outlines, by three. The third, for

"studies and university life", will focus on the students and "guarantee their political and union freedom". Above the councils will come the president of the university (effectively the vice-chancellor), who must be a practising researcher/teacher and who will be elected. The electorate will include not just the professors but the whole teaching staff (provided they are permanent and French). This, said one socialist in the Assembly, would put an end to the domination of the universities by the "mandarins" (the professors); but according to a member of the opposition, it would open up the presidency to political and union lobbying, thus further politicizing the already political universities.

As for examinations for students to pass from the first stage of university (the first one or two years) to the second — a proposal that stimulated much of the student protest — the text of the bill has merely been made more precise. In general, there will not be such examinations; but they will be imposed when the second stage would otherwise be overcrowded or when

ultimate employment for all students who would take the course seems unlikely.

And as for increased autonomy — pressed for by the opposition despite opposing it when in power — the universities will see little of it. One amendment would have given the universities the right to award their own degrees, rather than the national diplomas presently awarded. A socialist deputy responded that the opposition clearly wanted "the North American system", and would end up privatizing the universities and requiring students to pay their own fees. The amendment was rejected.

The Savary bill will open the first stage of universities to more students (the Right say another 300,000; Savary says 10,000 per year, or 40,000 in all); it may (or may not) turn more away at the entry to the second stage. It will turn the third stage into something close to a PhD — an idea welcomed by most French scientists. It will turn the universities' attention more towards industry and the jobs their students will enter. It will decrease the power of the professors over "their own" institutions, and increase the decision making structure within the university. It will leave the universities still broadly centrally managed and it will leave the *grandes écoles* largely alone. And it will leave France as divided as ever about the proper role of its universities. **Robert Walgate**

Synchrotron radiation

European rivalry hots up

Hamburg

AFTER the frustration of a prolonged shutdown in 1982 and a period of unreliability, the synchrotron radiation is now so good at DESY in Hamburg that the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL)'s outstation there can hardly keep up with the flow of visitors using its facilities. More staff have been budgeted for but have yet to be recruited. Without them — perhaps, in any case — the facilities at EMBL may become second choice for those with access to the new facilities at Daresbury in the United Kingdom operated by the British Science and Engineering Research Council.

In theory the staff of the EMBL outstation should be growing in number thanks to an extra budgetary allocation won for them by Dr Lennart Philipson, director general of EMBL in Heidelberg. The problem is that since then Dr Juan Bordas, who co-directed the outstation with Dr Michael Koch and has just moved to Daresbury, and two other staff members have moved on without being replaced. For now, the remaining staff have little time to carry out their own research and are up to their necks in assisting visitors.

Visitors come from many European countries, Israel and the United States. On the current list of 60 projects accepted by the priorities committee, one-third come from the Federal Republic of Germany and

one-sixth from the United Kingdom. The next most represented countries are the United States (6 projects) and Sweden (5). About half of the projects are straightforward protein crystallography. Most of the rest involve time-resolved scattering measurements, particularly on muscle and muscle related proteins.

As to the immediate future, the EMBL outstation knows it will increasingly feel competition from Daresbury now that the latter is really in operation, two years behind schedule. The one great advantage of Daresbury over DESY is that it is totally dedicated to synchrotron radiation. At DESY, priority is given at certain times to the colliding beam experiments of high-energy physicists. At such times the parasitic use of synchrotron radiation can continue but it is less than ideal.

That apart, opinions are mixed about the relative merits of the two facilities and depend to some extent on individual experiences at DESY and expectations of Daresbury. One view is that the lack of organization is bound to count against DESY. Another is that Daresbury has a long way to go before it can offer such good facilities as DESY for those who wish to carry out low-temperature work or time-resolved studies, for both of which the instrumentation developed by the EMBL staff has been invaluable. **Peter Newmark**