

French AIDS research effort comes under attack

■ European AIDS federation launched

■ French AIDS finances attacked

Paris

PROFESSOR Luc Montagnier last week announced in Paris the launch of a European Federation for Research on AIDS. But, on a national level, he feels that the French government's policy on AIDS research is "inconsistent" and confesses to being "very concerned" about the financial future of his own laboratory at the Pasteur Institute.

The European Federation for Research on AIDS (FERS), which has so far received support from the West German Korber Prize and the French Mutuelle civil service pension fund, aims to stimulate European cooperation between scientists actively engaged on AIDS research. Montagnier feels this will minimize conflict with other international organizations — such as the French American AIDS Foundation and the World AIDS Foundation (see *Nature* 330, 507; 1987) — which also finance information campaigns and paramedical workers, especially in Africa.

The federation whose membership includes representatives from Britain, West Germany, Italy and Switzerland, as well as France, has set itself four major research themes: virology (for example to study the role of regulatory proteins in the HIV-1 molecule), DNA (including research on HIV-2), immunology (mechanisms of infection) and clinical epidemiology.

The federation hopes to attract financial support from major pharmaceutical companies which, says Montagnier, have not been pulling their weight.

If the spirit of international cooperation and coordination within AIDS research is encouraging, Montagnier is less happy about levels of state funding this year. "Last year the government provided FF100 million (£10 million) for AIDS research. This year we have received only FF20 million. It's ridiculous." Although a reduction in the national budget was expected, because the first award included FF40 million for non-recurrent construction and equipment costs, Montagnier does not know if, or how much, extra money will be forthcoming. "We can't live off promises. What is needed is a 3–5 year plan, not the squeeze-box effect of massive funding in election years, followed by cuts when the government changes."

Montagnier says his own laboratory is running out of money and is currently dependent solely on (reduced) government grants. The Pasteur Institute

receives money from the French American AIDS Foundation and from fund-raising drives, but Montagnier says that little of this money comes to his laboratory, contrary to what may be supposed.

Professor Jean-Paul Lévy, who coordinates French AIDS research within the public sector (see *Nature* 328, 191; 1987) is more optimistic. "The FF20 million from



Montagnier — French AIDS policy critic.

the government is a first instalment for 1988, although it is true we do not know how much more will be provided. We expect to get a bit less this year, but, naturally, if the total fell below FF60 or FF70 million the national programme would become meaningless. But it should not be forgotten that salaries are already covered by the government's overall research budget."

A real problem, on a national scale, says Lévy, is the cutback in research appointments (see *Nature* 329, 380; 1987) a view echoed by Montagnier as well as by a number of representing researchers. While there is a slight preference for the major research organizations, such as CNRS and INSERM, to take on postdoctoral candidates in life sciences who want to work on AIDS, says Montagnier, "competition is great and other areas of research inevitably suffer". Money is available, however, to invite foreign researchers, especially within virology, an area that has been relatively neglected in France. But, says Lévy, there has been little response from young European virologists so far — an appeal quite specifically aimed at Britain.

Peter Coles

No visas for AAAS

Oxford

South African Minister of Home Affairs Stoffel Botha announced in Cape Town on 26 April that he had refused visas to a 7-member delegation of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The delegation had intended to visit South Africa to investigate how the emergency legislation had affected the provision of medical services in the country. M.C.

Plastic wrapping ban

Washington

SUFFOLK County, Long Island has become the first US county to attempt to ban plastic wrapping materials and replace them with biodegradable paper materials. From July 1989, the use of containers and bags made of polystyrene and polyvinylchloride will no longer be permitted in the county's grocery and food establishments. The county was one of the first to bar non-returnable bottles. A.A.

New OUP chief named

London

Professor Sir Roger Elliott, head of the theoretical physics department at the University of Oxford, has been appointed secretary to the delegates of Oxford University Press and chief executive for five years from 1 September 1988. M.S.

Student education tax

Sydney

AUSTRALIA'S Wran Committee has come out in favour of a tax surcharge for those receiving higher education. The committee, under Sir Neville Wran, has been trying to find ways of raising extra funds to pay for a planned increase in student enrolment (see *Nature* 332, 773; 1988).

Students will be expected to repay 20 per cent of the costs of their higher education through a tax surcharge, thought to be less than 5 per cent. The tax will apply to students who do not complete their education as well as to those who graduate. In medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and law, annual education costs amount to around A\$3,000. T.E.

Rabies in Finland

London

RABIES, unreported in Finland since 1959, has now broken out again, having reached the country from the Soviet Union. A massive inoculation programme has been launched, including, according to Agriculture Minister Toivo T. Pohjala, the oral vaccination of wild animals such as raccoon dogs. Seven new research posts to deal with rabies have been established by the Agriculture Ministry. Although only a few cases of the disease have so far been reported, there is concern that two — a fox and a dog — occurred well outside the border danger zone. V.R.