

the forests of the Amazon, that should be done separately from the taxation of rich consumers, where the objective should be to restrain demand for fossil fuel. And if the rain forests are where they are because those places are productive of trees, might it not be better for the greenhouse problem that they should be used as sources of construction timber and then replanted quickly?

Complications such as these argue powerfully for leaving the greenhouse problem where it properly belongs, in the hands of responsible governments and the politicians who run them. Technical agencies of the United Nations such as UNEP (despite its political pretensions) and the World Meteorological Organization would quickly be swamped by the unfamiliarity of the task if they were saddled with it. That is why the greenhouse effect is best guarded against by the means already used to set up a regulatory framework for CFCs (the effectiveness of which has still to be demonstrated) — an *ad hoc* international convention. But this is not to say that there is no technical function to be carried out within the framework of a convention. As budgets for atmospheric research increase, the need for objective synthesis and analysis of climatic data and of guarded prognosis becomes ever more urgent. Those working for an international convention could do worse than by saying to those willing to join that, to begin with, there will be no costs beyond those of helping to support a first-rate hard-headed monitoring agency. □

Beastly experiments

Regulation of the use of laboratory animals is necessary, but should journals censor what is published?

WHAT should be the policy of journals such as this on the publication of accounts of experiments that, while entirely within the law where they are carried out, may elsewhere be illegal or, at least, publicly offensive? This, for practical purposes, is the question raised last week by a correspondent writing from Britain (Scotland, to be specific) and commenting on an experiment with animals carried out in France (*Nature* 339, 248; 1989). Our correspondent, representing an organization called the Committee for the Reform of Animal Experimentation, gave it as his opinion that the experiments would not have been allowed by the legislation on laboratory animals in force in Britain since 1986 and that “no other reputable scientific journal published in this country [Britain] will accept reports of work that clearly would not have been authorized under British law”. The complaint is fairly, even temperately, made. It deserves an answer.

The most obvious weakness of the complaint is that it conflates two disparate issues — animal experimentation, which in most places requires regulation, and publication, which everywhere should be free from it (but, sadly, is often not). To separate the issues, think of (or, otherwise, imagine) a state in which public demonstrations against the government are illegal. Would it be reprehensible that

newspapers in that country should, of their own volition, decline to publish accounts of public demonstrations held in foreign capitals against foreign governments? Of course not. (That the governments concerned might decide that such reports would subversively put ideas into their own people's heads and would elect to impose involuntary censorship on its press is a different matter.) Nor could it be held that a scientific journal published in a country where genetic engineering is forbidden (West Germany, for the time being without a legal framework of regulation, is almost in that case — see page 327) would be acting improperly by publishing in that field. Lawyers would no doubt merely remark that the commission of illegal acts is criminal, but that describing of them is not.

The case of animal experimentation is more complicated. The days have long since gone when the research community claimed that the practice of research should be entirely free from regulation. Even if researchers had never neglected or mishandled animals, never used a laboratory animal when a tissue culture might do instead and had always set about the planning of experiments in which animals are involved with deliberation, care and the determination to cause the least pain, regulation would be necessary. In many countries, public concern about the use and the potential for the misuse of animals in research can be met only by a framework of regulation that is at once consistent and transparent. The beneficiaries are not merely laboratory animals and those concerned on their account, but researchers, whose work would be grossly encumbered if matters were differently arranged. Among reasonable people, the issues to be decided are how regulations should be drafted and applied.

That there should be variations of practice from one country to another, in relation both to the press and to animal experiments, is inevitable and unavoidable; legal systems differ. But even where, as in Britain, Japan and the United States (the three countries in which this journal is equivalently published), the press is free from formal regulation, it is wise that it should conduct itself in a seemly fashion. This journal's rule of thumb for at least a quarter of a century has been that the results of animal experiments that would not easily win general regulatory consent had better be of exceptional interest if they are to be published. This position is admittedly pragmatic (and requires a subjective judgement of what may be exceptionally interesting). The obvious counter-argument, that a refusal to publish will ensure that contentious experiments are not undertaken in the first place, might have more force if there were not, for other good reasons, such a variety of journals. □

Swift retribution?

The French laboratory from which the disputed experiments were reported in *Nature* is one of the two INSERM units broken into on 20 May (see page 326). The experiments bear on the understanding of visual handicap in the newborn.