

MEAT RESEARCH

Third World aid for Bristol?

Tokyo

WHEN a British research institute faced with the prospect of closure by the government recently sent out an international appeal for help, assistance in the form of money intended as aid for developing countries was probably the last thing expected. But that, by way of Japan, is what may come.

In July, A. A. Taylor of the Bristol Laboratory of the Agriculture and Food Research Council (AFRC), formerly the Meat Research Institute, sent a number of letters to colleagues overseas explaining that the British government intended to shut down the laboratory at the end of 1990, and asking for letters of support as a means of persuading the government to keep the laboratory open. One of these letters went to Keiji Umeda, director of the Food Engineering Division of the National Food Research Institute in Tsukuba near Tokyo.

In reply, Umeda suggested that the Bristol Laboratory should apply for Japanese Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) on the grounds that the laboratory could make a good training centre for Africans and Eastern Europeans. Umeda pointed out that the Japanese government announced thousands of millions of dollars in increased aid for

logy and quality assessment, along with basic research on muscle biology. It is considered a center of excellence by meat researchers around the world. But the UK government has decided that the meat industry should pay for the laboratory's research, and is cutting off support.

In his letter to Taylor, Umeda says that "the expertise in meat research at Bristol will never lose its importance for the rest of the world, even if the United Kingdom may not need government research any longer". According to Kiyooki Kato, a colleague of Umeda's at the National Food Research Institute, Umeda spent "very happy days" at the Low Temperature Research Institute in Cambridge in the 1950s, and his suggestion that the Bristol Laboratory apply for ODA money is just "friendly advice".

BRITISH UNIVERSITIES

Who pays for students?

London

GOVERNMENT plans to increase the number of British students in higher education were given a welcome by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) following their annual meeting at the University of Leeds. But the university leaders warned that expansion without increased Treasury support, as the government proposes, could mean that students would somehow have to pay their own tuition fees.

The need for a new system of student financing emerged as John MacGregor, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, reiterated government plans to increase undergraduate enrolments. He told CVCP there was no doubt that the proportion of students qualified to enter higher education would continue to rise, and expressed delight that universities were responding to the increase in demand "spurred on" by the "incentive" of receiving higher fees from October 1990.

An increase of 6,000 extra students has been reported for entry next year. Moreover, the government has revised upwards its estimate of the Age Participation Index (API, the proportion of individuals aged 18 and 19 going into higher education) which in 1989 stood at 15 per cent: the forecast API for the year 2000 has risen from 18.5 per cent to 23 per cent.

The CVCP welcomed the plans to increase university numbers but in a statement said "it becomes clear the government will not pay for the expansion it desires at a level which will protect high quality". Sir Edward Parkes, chairman of CVCP, foresaw three options by which the increase could be financed: universities could charge fees, a graduation tax

In Britain, the *Guardian* newspaper has suggested that the aid deal could be used by Japan as a "springboard into new markets in Eastern Europe and Africa, in competition with Britain". But Kato denies any such motive, saying Eastern Europe is too poor to import meat from the West or Japan. These nations desperately need to develop domestic production because meat supply is "vital to social stability". And as for Africa, Kato says, Umeda's intention is that the Bristol laboratory should link up with several international agricultural research centres in Africa that are also funded by ODA.

Taylor has contacted the Crown Agents. In a letter to Umeda on 6 September he says that although there does not seem to be much hope, the Crown Agents have requested more details, and adds "perhaps, now that Japanese companies own our motor industry, you can buy the institute".

David Swinbanks



Africa and Eastern Europe at the Western Economic Summit in Paris in July, and that in the 1990s these countries more than any others will be in need of technical guidance and assistance in meat research. But Japan lacks expertise on Africa and Eastern Europe. He suggested that Taylor should contact the Japanese Crown Agents in London, which handle Japanese grant aid, to offer the laboratory's assistance.

The Bristol Laboratory is one of three AFRC laboratories that grew out of the Low Temperature Research Station in Cambridge. It carries out research on meat from slaughter through refrigeration, processing, packaging, on microbio-

related to income could be introduced or the high standards of higher education could be allowed to decline. He suggested that universities could charge full-cost fees, which most undergraduates would be able to meet largely by scholarships derived from government funds.

Such a scheme would enable universities to select potential students from lower economic classes. Universities could play Robin Hood, he argued, by "squeezing the middle classes and employers to pay for the less affluent". Students from lower economic groups would be awarded scholarships based on merit, whereas wealthier students would pay full tuition fees. Universities would publicize the full costs of each course. These would be above those charged to overseas students, which range from £4,000 a year for an arts course to £10,000 for medicine. Parkes emphasized, however, that this system was not a CVCP policy initiative but an avenue to explore.

The CVCP would appeal to present and prospective students, parents and employers for help in persuading the government to provide generous scholarship support. These actions constitute a genuine way forward, Parkes declared, and should not be thought of as alarmist tactics to force the Treasury to give more money to higher education. The vice-chancellors, he concluded, "are not playing games".

The Association of University Teachers (AUT), condemned the CVCP's proposals because they would restrict higher education to the 'privileged few'. Diana Warwick, AUT general secretary, said the CVCP had invited the government to privatize universities and "turn them into yuppie finishing schools".

Ben Webb