

Germans face yet tighter rules on lab animals

Munich. German biologists, already working under one of Europe's toughest animal protection laws, may find themselves involved in even more form-filling and delays to experiments if next week's parliamentary agricultural committee approves plans to tighten the law further.

Two clauses are causing particular concern among scientists. One is a requirement for advanced notice of experiments on invertebrates. In other European countries, and in the European Commission (EC) directive on use of animals in research, invertebrates are exempt, but in Germany their status has been unclear because the current law refers to animals, rather than vertebrates, when referring to controls on experiments. Most of Germany's 16 *Länder* interpret the term to mean vertebrates, in line with the EC directive. But some interpret it more literally and require vertebrates and invertebrates to be registered.

The confusion may be cleared up by the proposed changes — but the resolution will not be to the advantage of scientists. While current law requires experiments on animals to be notified two weeks in advance, suggested changes include maintaining the two-week period of advance notice for invertebrates, thus making registration of invertebrate experiments a strict legal requirement, and extending to four weeks the period of notice for experiments on vertebrates.

The second concern is over the proposal that permission should be sought every time an animal is killed for an organ but is not itself used in an experiment. This will not reduce the number of animals killed, science lobby groups argue, but it will hinder research.

Problems began two years ago when Germany, like all other European Union

countries, was obliged to modify animal protection laws in line with EC guidelines. The required changes were benign, but the strong German animal lobby exploited the reconsideration to press for other changes.

Last summer, the state of Baden-Württemberg proposed changes to the

ny's major grant-giving body) have all expressed alarm over the proposed changes, which, they claim, will increase the bureaucracy for scientists without changing the level of protection afforded to animals.

Klaus Fleischmann of the AGF says that although each individual change is apparently trivial, the sum of the changes means that scientists will find themselves burdened with considerably more bureaucracy at a time when the research minister, Paul Krüger, is campaigning for the easing of laws restrictive to science. The parliamentary science committee has also fought against the more restrictive changes to the animal bill.

Fleischmann is worried that the agricultural committee, which has ultimate responsibility for the final draft of the new bill, will not support the science lobby. He says the focus on animal experiments suits the farming lobby by distracting attention from the fact that there will be no requirement to improve conditions for the care and transport of animals intended for food, which are not stringently controlled.

If the wording of the bill is agreed next Wednesday, as planned, it could become law by summer. However, the level of controversy could delay its passage beyond October's general election. **Alison Abbott**

Soros award for 24

Moscow. Twenty-four Russian scientists have been certified as George Soros Emeritus Professors as part of the International Soros Science Education Program (ISSEP) to support education in physics, mathematics, chemistry and biology in the former Soviet Union.

Besides providing the recipients with stipends of \$200 a month for five years, the titles, awarded personally by Soros on a recent visit to Moscow, seem likely to become a valued mark of honour.

Among the recipients were Evgeny Feinberg, a physicist and a close friend of the late Andrei Sakharov, and Daniil Lybedev, the well-known fighter against Lysenko during the darkest of times. One laureate did not live to see the awards ceremony, the former president of the Russian Academy of Sciences and director of the Kurchatov Institute, Anatoly Aleksandrov.

The ISSEP is intended to fill the gap left by the two existing Soros programmes supporting basic science and the humanities. The programme is planned to last for five years. Soros has already allocated \$25 million for the first year.

Besides these elite awards, grants are being established for high-school teachers and university lectureships. Three thousand science teachers will receive grants; five hundred university professors will receive the title of Soros Professor. **Vladimir Pokrovsky**

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REASONS

Animal research: more bureaucracy?

Bundestag sympathetic to the demands of animal rights groups. This was followed by a formal proposal by the Bundesrat to tighten up the animal laws. These proposals have been discussed in several parliamentary committees whose deliberations will be distilled into a formal bill for the Bundestag next week by the agricultural committee.

Research organizations including the Max Planck Society, the AGF (which represents national research centres) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Germa-

Czech institute to start from scratch

Prague. Plans to create a learned society in the Czech republic may go ahead, despite the failure of the government to sanction the idea with a law.

Rudolf Zahradník, the president of the Czech Academy of Sciences, wants to create a new learned society in line with most Western European countries. Last spring he asked the Czech president Václav Havel to elect the first 20 members of the proposed society. Havel agreed, on condition that the founding of a society was supported by a law.

But the government has steadfastly refused to create such a new law, resisting what it sees as overlegislation in reaction to the country's communist past. A recent interministerial meeting with scientific advisers once again gave the idea short shrift.

Zahradník is disappointed that the chance for a launch of the proposed society by Havel, which would have lent it a strong

degree of credibility and idealism, has been lost. But he still hopes that the learned society will be formed this year from a core of academics who have already joined a Foundation for the Reestablishment of a Learned Society.

In communist times, the Czech Academy acted as a learned society as well as controlling around 80 basic research institutes. But its role as a learned society was corrupted by politics, and the Czech Academy was the only academy in all of the former communist states in eastern Europe to abandon this function, after the 'velvet revolution' in 1990. Now it only runs the research institutes.

Zahradník would like the new learned society to take over the title Czech Academy of Sciences. This would minimize confusion, being in line with learned societies in other countries. **Alison Abbott**