

live animals of all kinds by the sea ferry routes from Britain to the mainland. Now the fuss has engendered similar fusses about the intensive rearing of sheep (and the stimulated birth of early lambs) and the export of live horses to 'the Continent'. Yet the protesters who now insist that the only safeguard of the welfare of British farm animals is that they should never be sent abroad will be in the van of those protesting at the still hypothetical hormonal treatment of cattle to make lactation permanent in dairy cows. The truth, of course, is that the welfare of domestic animals is crucial for the psychic welfare of those who have care of them, that it requires constant consideration and that it is not improved by the pursuit of militancy at the dockside. □

Research accountability

The row in Japan over research accountability has more to do with control of the civil service than with research.

EVERY government needs a good civil service, but the Japanese government is too well provided. That is one lesson to be learned from the row in Tokyo last month leading to the removal from his post of Mr Kinju Atarashi, the administrative head of the Science and Technology Agency (see page 177). Atarashi lost his post (but keeps his salary) because he disagreed with the political head of his agency, Ms Makiko Tanaka, on making public the names of government organizations she wishes to see reorganized. What will worry Atarashi's fellow bureaucrats is whether his plight presages what will happen to many others. The more general concern should be whether the outcome will be damaging for Japan's research.

The underlying difficulty is that of the status in Japan of several semi-public organizations, some but not all of which are engaged with research. These organizations exist because the bureaucracy itself has recognized that there are many important public functions that cannot be carried out effectively within the framework of a government department. That is the spirit in which the US government had the wit, in the 1940s, to appoint outside managers for the research and manufacturing establishments of the Manhattan Project, since transformed into what are called the national laboratories. Similarly, in Germany, more than a dozen major public research establishments operate at some distance from the research ministry, whence their funds derive. It is not surprising that Japan should also have recognized that much research is best partly hived off.

To outsiders, what is mystifying is that Atarashi should have so resisted his minister's wish that the semi-public organizations should be evaluated by their sponsors as to lead to a public row. In Japan, of course, this will simply be a sign that the government is at last challenging the bureaucracy to hand over the reins of power. In truth, it cannot but be a benefit for the government of Japan and for the research organizations it supports as *tokushu hojin* that the performance of these organizations should be open to public scrutiny, both by taxpayers and by the research profession. Many

of them are such telling proofs of the wisdom of the bureaucrats in seeking for them a niche outside the government framework that they have nothing to fear. The others will know who they are, and will be comforted that Tanaka's hit-list is still secret. □

Naming people lightly

The naming of new human species should be the business of those skilled at the job.

If proof were needed that many cell and molecular biologists are innocent of the fundamental conventions of biological nomenclature, one need look no further than a study of amino-acid racemization in the hair of 'Ötze', the well-known 5,200-year-old corpse recovered from an Austrian glacier (G. Lubec, M. Weninger and S. R. Anderson, *FASEB Journal* 8, 1166-1169; 1994). With breathtaking abandon, Lubec *et al.* assign Ötze to a new species, *Homo tirolensis*. No reason is given for this casual designation. Readers will look in vain for the careful systematic and diagnostic argument that such nomenclature requires.

The taxonomic status of the genus *Homo* is, of course, a matter of energetic debate in anthropological circles just now. The status of its constituent species is likewise contentious. If Lubec *et al.* decided to brush all that tiresomely fastidious business of nomenclature aside so as to get on with the serious and satisfyingly messy business of grave-haunting, there are probably some who would forgive them.

Palaeoanthropologists, meanwhile, are left to wonder what Lubec *et al.* have up their sleeves. If the natural habitat of *Homo tirolensis* (sample size of one) was a glacier, it may have had all sorts of adaptations to the cold that are absent from the warmth-loving African *Homo sapiens*. After all, if such arguments have been used to support the separate status of *Homo neanderthalensis*, why not Ötze? Indeed, life on a glacier would have demanded more than even rugged Neanderthals could have given, in which case the adaptations of *Homo tirolensis* may justify a new generic, not merely a new specific name. Without diagnostic leg material, even the question whether Ötze was bipedal remains open. On the basis of a study of Ötze's hair, Lubec *et al.* must at least entertain the possibility that Ötze is in fact a yeti.

But why stick with these down-to-earth possibilities? What if Ötze were a resident of a small planet near Betelgeuse who accidentally fell out of a passing spacecraft? In that case, all resemblances to the genus *Homo* would be entirely coincidental, illustrations of convergent evolution perhaps, and Ötze would be even less closely related to modern humans than (say) the average spirochaete. That truth, if such it were, would be so disturbing that the editors and referees of the journal might have decided to allow the name *Homo tirolensis* to pass into print without further comment, in the hope that nobody would notice and the whole hideous affair would be hushed up. After all, *FASEB Journal* is not widely read by anthropologists. Only the omniscience of the Internet as made its little plot apparent on this occasion. □