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PUNCHSTOCK



SNAPSHOT Fresh scope

This photograph, taken on 20 July 1925, is one of 52 previously unpublished pictures of the 'monkey trial', in which the state of Tennessee found John Scopes guilty of teaching evolution. The negatives have just been restored by the Smithsonian Institution Archives in Washington DC.

Marcel LaFollette, an independent historian, stumbled across the images while doing unrelated research. They were among 475 boxes of material donated to the archive in 1971 by the Science Service, a Washington-based group that promotes science in the media. Watson Davis, later director of the service, took the informal shots while reporting on the case.

Scopes was being tried for teaching evolution after it had been banned earlier that year. This image was taken after hot weather caused the proceedings to move outdoors, and it shows prosecutor William Jennings Bryan (seated at the left) being interrogated by Scopes' defence lawyer Clarence Seward Darrow.

► www.siarchives.si.edu/research/scopes.html

W. DAVIS/SMITHSONIAN ARCHIVES

Australian scientists protest at loss of funding board

SYDNEY

The Australian government has abolished the board of the nation's basic research agency, raising concerns that funding will become susceptible to political interference.

The Australian Research Council (ARC) administered AUS\$556 million (US\$420 million) in competitive grants this year. Under the current system, recommendations from peer reviews of grant applications are ranked by experts and passed to a board of leading community, industry and academic representatives. They are then sent to the council's chief executive, who passes them to the federal science and education minister, Brendan Nelson, for final approval.

When the board goes in 2006, only the chief executive, Peter Høj, will stand between the peer-review process and the minister.

The government says that removing the board will expedite the grant review process. The restructuring follows a government-commissioned review of all statutory authorities, which recommended that the ARC be governed using an executive management model, not a board.

But many scientists are concerned that the changes will eliminate a crucial buffer to political interference. "It might be administratively cleaner, but it will be a troubling loss of independence," says Snow Barlow, a plant biologist at the University of Melbourne, Victoria, and president of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, near Canberra.

"I think the government is tightening its control," agrees Frank Larkins, deputy vice-chancellor of research at the University of Melbourne. Recent reviews of the higher-

education and research sector have underscored the government's drive for priority-driven research, closer collaborations between industry and academia and a tighter rein on universities (see *Nature* 429, 118; 2004).

Abolishing the board would leave the ARC vulnerable to political whim, according to John Mullarvey, chief of the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, based in Canberra. "The board is a powerful lobby," he says. "Unless that lobbying comes from somewhere else, this will have a detrimental impact on Australian research. We don't want projects rejected because they don't fit the ideology of the government."

He says his committee will work to ensure that the ARC's peer-review process is adequately protected by law.

Carina Dennis