

Social sciences in France

Few friends on the right

The unsympathetic manner in which Britain's Sir Keith Joseph regards the social sciences has precedents across the Channel, according to a long-awaited report on the social sciences in France. Figures collected by M. Maurice Godelier, a respected left-wing anthropologist and friend of the Mitterrand government, show that Giscard d'Estaing, the previous President of France, slashed social science spending by more than half between 1976 and 1981, and the humanities by nearly a quarter. Now is the time for reconstruction, and the government seems likely to follow M. Godelier's recommendations, although science and industry minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement said on introducing the report that full implementation would be too costly.

According to Godelier, there is much work to do. Giscard caused such a collapse in the human sciences "that the general public would hardly believe it". Libraries and documentation centres were particularly badly hit. The result was that subjects not protected by this or that "mandarin" were smothered. In the scramble for funds, academic standards went by the board. Economics fared best, but only mainstream neoclassical economics. Sociology, tainted with being "leftist", was worse hit.

Godelier is thus starting almost from scratch. He recommends recreating infrastructures destroyed by Giscard (contract research supported by government departments had almost disappeared). He wants buildings repaired, libraries re-equipped, more funds for field studies and for publi-

cations, improved international contacts and more staff.

Nobody is likely to disagree with any of that — except for the size of the bill. But eyebrows have been raised in some quarters by his statement that the "new dynamic" should be founded not only on an increase in funding but also on a different cutting of the cake, in response to "a new evaluation of needs". These, it seems, would in part be turned towards the realities of modern French life, involving the study, for example, of both business and administration — the elite.

Moreover, Godelier has recommended the setting up of many more interdisciplinary studies, and cross-border funding committees — which might threaten the very "mandarins" who survived Giscard. Godelier is thus seen as a personal and political threat in some quarters; and when this is combined with his forthright manner, he finds himself facing considerable opposition.

Thus when Chevènement attempted to make Godelier director of social sciences at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) last year, key figures in CNRS resigned over this alleged interference with "academic freedom". But others have pointed out that the man Godelier was to replace (and who did indeed resign, leaving a vacancy still unfilled) was himself a political appointee, a friend of Giscard's prime minister, Raymond Barre. Chevènement's logic was not faulty.

The political problem now is to fill the

hot seat at CNRS, from which the Godelier reforms will be implemented, without creating too much uproar. Some kind of compromise, which might perhaps involve Godelier getting half the job but not the full responsibility, seems to be in the offing.

Robert Walgate

Education in Afghanistan

Russian aid

Afghanistan has embarked on a major programme of expansion of higher and technical education, Mr Sarwar Mangal, the Minister of Higher and Vocational Education, announced recently. Mr Mangal, who became minister at the end of September, was taking part in a series of special broadcasts on Kabul radio in which ministers explain the work of their ministries.

The expansion programme will concentrate on those areas most important to the national economy — in particular engineering and agricultural sciences. Three new agricultural technical institutes will be founded at Mazar-e Sharif, Jalalabad and Baglan, and the agricultural secondary school at Helmand will be upgraded to an agricultural technical college. Major building works are under way at Kabul University (a chemistry institute, classrooms block and accommodation for lecturers and students), Nangarhar University (faculty of education and agriculture school) and Balkh (agricultural school). A new accommodation block for Kabul Polytechnic Institute will be started in the near future. Mr Mangal admitted, however, that there were "deficiencies, shortcomings and improper management" in the building programme.

Higher education in Afghanistan has mushroomed in the past few years. Enrolment in higher education (including the Kabul Polytechnic Institute and the Mangarhar and Kabul medical schools) in the Afghan year 1361 (March 1982–March 1983) was 155, a 250 per cent increase compared with 1355 (1976–77). Entrance examinations were recently standardized, although ex-soldiers are admitted to university without taking the competitive examination. Recruitment to technical-vocational education seems to be going more slowly; Mangal spoke of recent improvements in the vocational sphere, including the launching of poster campaigns and sports contests to attract young people to vocational courses. The first "professional-technical" school, which can train 100 students in the maintenance of vehicles and industrial machinery and which was constructed under a grant-in-aid from the Soviet Union, was opened recently, and a similar television and refrigerator maintenance school, equipped by the Soviet Union, should be ready at the end of this (Afghan) year or the beginning of the next.

Spending low on France's books

A library, to a researcher in the humanities or social sciences, writes Hervé Le Bras, director of research at the Institut National des Etudes Démographiques, is like a telescope to an astronomer. But, claims Le Bras in an appendix to the Godelier report (see adjacent story), French libraries (though never good) are now "catastrophic".

The present state of affairs is illustrated by a comparison between the British Library (based in part at the British Museum) and the French equivalent, the

Bibliothèque Nationale. The table shows, in particular, a lack of French funds, posts and lending.

Some other figures: the Bibliothèque Nationale buys only 3.6 per cent of European titles in languages other than French, and only 2 per cent of North American titles. "The shadow which covers our own history [through lack of texts and documents] also extends to the rest of the world" says Le Bras. French social sciences "must not become provincial" he says.

	<i>British Library</i> (1979–80)	<i>Bibliothèque Nationale</i> (1981–82)
Total budget (FF)*	381,205,000	61,740,766
Conservation budget	24,200,000	11,611,508
Acquisitions of titles	2,100,000	750,000
Accredited readers	18,800	15,600
Staff	1,125	802
Requests for borrowing	2,375,000	24,700
Lending for borrowing	2,375,000	24,700
Lending budget (FF)	22,792,000	250,000
Lending staff	730	54

*(FF 12 = £1)