

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)

Higher and professional education is critically dependent on Soviet aid. As well as supplying funds for the professional schools, the Soviet "Progress Publishing Company" is to produce more than 200 university textbooks with a total print-run of 300,000 copies as grant in aid. (These will mostly be translations of existing Soviet texts). Moreover, although postgraduate courses up to master's degree

are now available at the Kabul Polytechnic Institute and will shortly be introduced at Kabul University, most postgraduate training can still take place only in the Soviet Union. This year, some 1,500 graduate students began courses in Moscow, which, compared with the 4,155 freshmen enrolled this year, constitutes a sizeable proportion of the student body.

Vera Rich

FDA on overseas data

US drug market to open up?

Washington

New drugs may be approved for sale in the United States solely on the basis of foreign data under a proposed reorganization of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) new drug application process. One effect may be to facilitate the entry of drugs developed abroad into the US market.

The proposed changes, published last week, have already provoked some strong reactions. Under current FDA rules, at least one of the clinical studies of a new drug must be conducted within the United States. Critics claim that FDA's proposal, increasing the admissibility of foreign data, flies in the face of evidence that foreign studies are difficult to verify and that standards for protection of human subjects are generally lower outside the United States.

In a discussion that accompanies the new proposal, FDA concedes that there are problems in accepting foreign studies. For one thing, genetic differences between foreign and US populations may render foreign results inapplicable; similarly, differences in medical practice and even in terminology (the definition of "depression", for example, is shaded by cultural differences from country to country) may also be significant. FDA admits, too, that the competence of foreign researchers is more difficult to judge than that of US scientists. FDA's proposed solution is to reject applications based solely on foreign studies when "the calibre of the key clinical investigators and facilities is unknown" or when there is "reason to believe" that genetic, medical or cultural differences affect the applicability of the results to the United States.

But a potentially more serious obstacle to the acceptability of foreign data is the difficulty of auditing foreign clinical trials. A House of Representatives subcommittee found last August (see *Nature* 12 August, p.598) that FDA investigators were unable to gain access to the medical records of a clinical trial in a Canadian hospital because of local confidentiality laws; and an audit of one Mexican study found patients' records destroyed.

FDA says it will reject applications if a "for-cause" inspection is considered necessary and then cannot be carried out

because of such obstacles. But Dan Sigelman, who is on the staff of the House subcommittee that investigated FDA, says that this is a "Catch-22". FDA routinely conducts spot-check audits of domestic studies and these, according to Sigelman, are what normally turn up the cause for further "for-cause" inspections. "On what ground are you going to determine the need for an audit without an audit?" he asks.

Sigelman also questions FDA's assertion that US drug companies will continue to favour US studies so that they can acquaint US physicians with the new drug before it is marketed. "They can sit and argue all they want that drug companies won't go abroad, but if the trade-off is getting a drug on the market more quickly, you're just opening up the floodgates to foreign data", he says.

The change on foreign data had been pressed by the US drug companies' trade group, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association (PMA). PMA also got its way on another controversial point: FDA is proposing to drop the current requirement that case-report forms from clinical trials be submitted with new drug applications. In place of these forms, which are made out by the clinical investigator on each patient, a tabulation of the raw data would be submitted. Under this proposed change, FDA could still request the case-report forms, but only when a "legitimate need for them exists in order to conduct an adequate review of the application".

The only noticeable tightening of the rules in the FDA proposal concerns the reporting of adverse findings about a drug by its manufacturer. The current rules are vague on how and even whether adverse findings are to be reported to FDA once an application is on file for approval — as the case of Eli Lilly and Co.'s reporting of deaths among Oraflex (benoxapofen) users demonstrated earlier this year.

FDA's proposal requires drug companies to file a safety report every four months when it has an application on file. FDA is also proposing to tighten its requirements on reporting of adverse effects of drugs already on the market: fatal and life-threatening effects would be reported to FDA within 15 days in "alert reports", other "adverse experiences"

within 30 days.

Critics are calling these changes window dressing, however. Dr Sidney Wolfe of the Ralph Nader Health Research Group says, "my response to this whole stunt is that the more important issue is enforcing existing regulations". Wolfe cites FDA's continued failure to bring criminal charges against Lilly, as recommended by a former FDA investigator, for withholding adverse effect data on Oraflex and three other drugs.

FDA is accepting public comments on its proposed changes until 20 December. After digesting these — and possibly making some alterations — the agency will publish a final rule, probably in early spring. As the proposals stand now, though, it is clear that the big winners are the drug companies, which will be able to file less paper, receive quicker responses and have an easier time introducing drugs already marketed abroad into the United States.

Stephen Budiansky

Halley upstaged?

Washington

The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has set one of its spacecraft on a complex manoeuvring course that will enable it to intercept and study the Giacobini-Zinner comet on 11 September 1985 — six months before Soviet, European and Japanese spacecraft are due to meet Halley's comet.

The Giacobini-Zinner comet, which approaches the Sun every 13 years, will not be visible from the Earth, but the better known Halley's comet has already been detected with the 5-metre Hale telescope on Palomar Mountain.

NASA's plan is to move the International Sun-Earth Explorer (ISEE 3), which has been in a permanent orbit between the Earth and the Sun since 1978, measuring electric and magnetic fields. US scientists have been upset by the Reagan Administration's cancellation of the \$250 million plan for a US spacecraft to Halley's comet. The NASA decision to use ISEE 3 to intercept another comet first may console them, because the United States will thereby be the first to provide valuable data that others can use in analysis of Halley's comet.

ISEE 3 has already been moved to the side of the Earth away from the Sun and on 6 February next year it will be directed on a course that will take it past the Moon. It will then be brought close to the Moon to use its gravity to give the spacecraft a push towards the comet. After the Giacobini-Zinner probe, ISEE 3 may be used to measure the solar wind extending from the Sun towards Halley's comet at the time when the other probes reach that comet early next year.

Deborah Shapley