Biology in Europe: The Wrangling Is Over, EMBO Has a Lab

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), which for 13 years has been little more than a gleam in the eyes of a few scientists, is about to become a reality. A site has been cleared for it in the foothills outside Heidelberg, West Germany, and, according to the laboratory's first director-general, Sir John Kendrew, construction should begin this month. Meanwhile, the first staff members of the laboratory are already working on their research projects in laboratories borrowed from the adjacent Max Planck Institute for Nuclear Fusion, the German Cancer Research Institute in Heidelberg, and the University of Heidelberg.

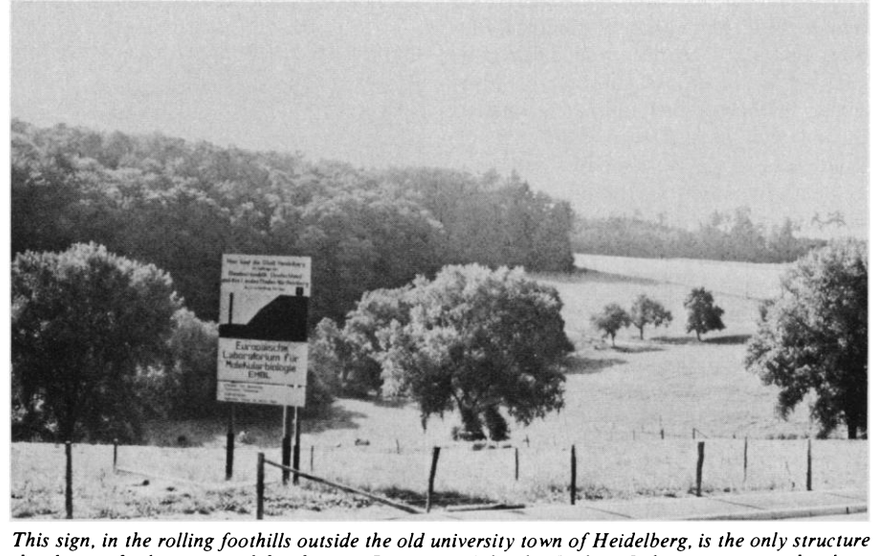
The EMBL is a legally separate offshoot of the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), which was founded as a result of 1962 discussions among Kendrew, Victor Weiskopf, Leo Szilard, and James Watson. The EMBO was established to organize an international laboratory, organize summer courses, and provide fellowships and travel grants for scientists from the member countries and scientists traveling to the member countries. Some initial support for EMBO came from the Volkswagen Foundation, which carried it until 1968, when the 15 member countries of the parent European Molecular Biology Conference began supporting it. It was not until July 1974, however, that ten of these (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Austria, and Israel) ratified the convention that established the laboratory; the other five countries (Greece, Spain, Ireland, Norway, and Belgium*) pleaded lack of funds, but are expected to join at a later date. All three organizations are funded in the same manner as CERN in that member nations subscribe in proportion to their gross national products.

The current plan for the laboratory is actually the second such plan. In 1968, a committee headed by Kendrew presented to the conference a much more comprehensive plan which he describes as twice as large and "not very well worked out." The plan was turned down flat, and 2 years later the group presented the much-trimmed plan that was ratified last year. The new plan calls for nearly $2.5 million for construction of the laboratory, $4 million to equip it, and an annual budget of about $5.5 million. The laboratory will eventually have a roster of about 60 staff scientists and an equal number of visiting scientists, and the total employment will be about 300.

The Kendrew committee had apparently hoped that the laboratory would be located in Geneva adjacent to CERN. But, while no one will admit to it on the record, it seems clear that West Germany effectively blocked the establishment of the laboratory until it was chosen as the site. Germany was then the only major European country that did not have an international laboratory, and it had just lost the 400-Gev CERN accelerator that is now being constructed on the border of France and Switzerland, so the choice seems justifiable. The specific site of the laboratory, which was a gift of the German government and the city of Heidelberg, was chosen because of its proximity to the Max Planck Institute for Nuclear Fusion. The organizers of the laboratory wanted it to be near a major physics institution so that certain facilities and technological expertise would be available for some of its projects, particularly the development of new instrumentation for biological research.

Molecular biology is, according to Kendrew, on the threshold of a new need for large-scale, sophisticated instruments for examining the structure and function of cells. Most national laboratories, he argues, are not set up in a manner that would allow them to develop these instruments; even if they were, it could well be a waste of resources for more than one institution to develop any particular expensive instrument. The new laboratory will thus be distinctive in that it will have an exceptionally large number of people from many places working on instruments that will be used by scientists throughout Europe. Whereas a typical national laboratory might have 10 to 12 people in electronic and mechanical workshops to assist perhaps 120 or more scientists, at EMBL the number of individuals in the workshops will be equal to the number of scientists.

The types of instruments that EMBL might work on are perhaps typified by work at the two outstations that are already established. One outstation will use high-intensity x-irradiation produced by the Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron at Hamburg for the study of biological systems. The intensity of the radiation produced there, Kendrew says, is almost unprecedented in biological studies, and it will thus be necessary to produce new types of instruments to use it most effectively, including many remotely operated instruments. This facility, which now has six staff members and several visiting scientists, has been operating for about 18 months. The second outstation is a similar facility at the high-flux neutron reactor at the Institut Max von Laue–Paul Langevin



This sign, in the rolling foothills outside the old university town of Heidelberg, is the only structure that has so far been erected for the new European Molecular Biology Laboratory. A site has been cleared across the street from the sign, however, and construction should begin this month.

*Belgium represents an anomaly in that the government has not joined the conference, but participates through its national research council. It thus apparently cannot join the laboratory.

in Grenoble, France. This outstation is just now being established and a new director has just been appointed.

Beyond the emphasis on instrumentation, EMBL will focus on areas that are not being exploited by national laboratories. The projects, Kendrew says, will thus emphasize the study of animal cells rather than the bacteriophages and *Escherichia coli* that have been the staples of molecular biological research. Another aspect of EMBL's research will be the study of biological structures—with the exception of proteins, which are receiving much work elsewhere. One other possibility, which is not yet definite, might be the construction of safe facilities for studies of genetic engineering. In all cases, Kendrew adds, the projects will be designed to complement projects at national laboratories rather than to compete with them.

Since last year's ratification of the convention establishing EMBL, things have gone rather smoothly for the laboratory. About the only hitch so far has been insufficient space to house its staff. Kendrew, with the politesse of a man in an uncomfortable position, says that the amount of space currently provided is sufficient for the 12 scientists now on the staff, but other sources say that the laboratory has not been provided as much space as it was promised and that Kendrew has thus not been able to hire as many investigators as he had planned to. Everyone agrees, however, that the problem will become more acute when the staff grows to 70 by the end of the year.—THOMAS H. MAUGH II

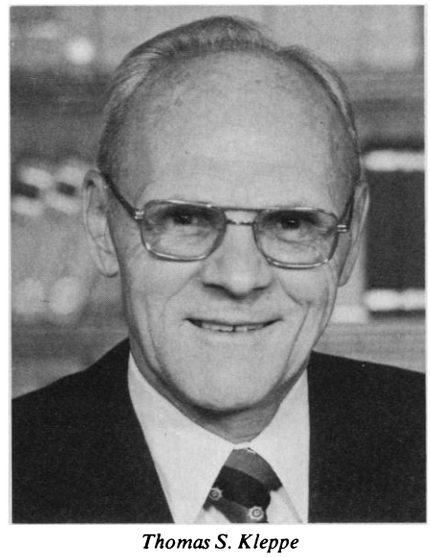
Interior: President's Nominee for Secretary Has His Problems

In an ideal world, after the White House has nominated a new Cabinet officer, the senators reviewing the nominee's fitness for confirmation would be able to focus almost exclusively on his record and opinions as they bear upon the responsibilities he is to assume. But with President Ford's nomination of Thomas S. Kleppe as the new Secretary of the Interior, senators may find that their first obligation is to determine whether Kleppe, as administrator of the scandal-ridden Small Business Administration (SBA) during the past 4½ years, has proven himself an alert and scrupulous manager in his present job.

The vacancy at Interior has existed since the resignation in late July of Stanley Hathaway, who had been confirmed by the Senate little more than a month earlier after prolonged hearings and much criticism of his record as governor of Wyoming. Hathaway had ultimately entered the hospital in a state of "depression." Politicians in the West try to assert what amounts to virtually a proprietary claim on Interior's top job, so it is no surprise that Kleppe, a former congressman from North Dakota, is from that region too.

His nomination was not made official until 9 September, but Kleppe informed senators from his home state on 3 September that he was the President's choice. At the time, FBI agents were still busy checking out Kleppe as part of the routine clearance procedures which, somewhat anomalously, tend to come as a final step preliminary to major presidential appointments. A *Science* reporter gained confirmation of this by chance in talking with a Civil Service Commission (CSC) employee on Friday, 5 September. The reporter was asking about a Congressional report that contained a statement of CSC charges implicating Kleppe's immediate office in abuses of civil service laws and regulations. After leaving the phone momentarily to look for the report, the employee returned and remarked. "I'm sorry, my boss gave our last copy to an FBI investigator yesterday."

In August of 1974, Bernard Rosen, executive director of the CSC, sent a letter of "admonishment" to the SBA's director of personnel, Carl E. Grant, asserting that Grant's office had failed to uphold the integrity of the merit system. At the same time, Rosen recommended that the CSC dismiss from federal employment another SBA official whom he charged with having repeatedly violated civil service regulations while serving as Kleppe's special assistant.



Thomas S. Kleppe

This latter official, Loren Rivard, was accused of being a party to the appointment of several SBA district directors on a basis of political favoritism. And there is reason to believe that the decision of the CSC investigative staff not to subject Kleppe himself to sworn interrogation about some of these personnel matters was a close judgment that reflected a degree of deferrence to a presidential appointee. The CSC cannot remove such an appointee from office, but, where there is compelling evidence of wrongdoing, it can and sometimes does interrogate the individual in question and submit a report of its findings to the President.

The charges against Rivard, together with some lesser charges of political favoritism made against one of the SBA regional directors, are being contested by those named and await a hearing by an administrative law judge. Pending this hearing, Rivard is declining to make public his letter to the CSC defending his behavior as the SBA administrator's special assistant.

In the fall of 1973, Kleppe wanted Rivard promoted to the job of a district director in the Midwest. But Kleppe was told by Robert E. Hampton, chairman of the CSC, that, pending completion of the then only recently begun investigation of the serious allegations against Rivard, certification of his suitability for the district job would be withheld. Undeterred, in March of 1974 Kleppe promoted Rivard to the still better job that he holds today—the $34,600-a-year post of deputy associate administrator for operations. Because this job is outside the civil service, Rivard could be appointed without CSC certification of his suitability for it.

Political hanky-panky in the appointment of SBA district directors, which apparently goes all the way back to the agency's early years in the 1950's, might seem tame stuff in a Washington that has seen