
Weinberger Backs Biowarfare Lab

Responding to a congressional critic, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has expressed strong support for a controversial Army plan to build a sophisticated new laboratory for tests involving infectious and lethal biological agents. The laboratory, to be constructed at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, will incorporate P4, or maximum, government safety standards. It is intended to speed the design and manufacture of equipment needed to defend against an attack with biological weapons.

But the laboratory has itself been attacked by some prominent biological scientists on the grounds that it could potentially be used to develop offensive biological weapons banned by an international treaty (*Science*, 7 December, p. 1176). It has also been attacked because the Army attempted to get appropriations for the laboratory through an obscure legislative provision that effectively barred any formal congressional votes, hearings, or debates.

Noting both these concerns, Senator James Sasser (D-Tenn.), the ranking minority member of the Appropriations subcommittee on military construction, had requested that Weinberger withdraw the proposal and resubmit it next year as a formal budget request, subject to a full congressional debate. Weinberger has now effectively declined. In a letter on 20 November, he said that the laboratory was urgently needed to "develop and field adequate biological and toxin protection," and urged Sasser to withdraw his objection.

Dismissing any possibility that the laboratory could be misused, Weinberger stated emphatically that no work would be performed outside the bounds of the existing international treaty. "We do not engage in any biological or toxin weapons development activities," he said. "The facility at Dugway will not support a biological or toxin weapons program. Its size also does not provide any unique capabilities to investigate general biological and toxin agent properties and characteristics. Further, the chamber will be too small to test weapons."

The letter did not resolve uncertain-

ties about the precise biological agents to be tested in the laboratory. Nor did it shed any additional light on whether the laboratory might be used to produce new toxins (as opposed to toxin *weapons*) or whether it might be used to experiment with genetically modified organisms, areas that many scientists feel the Pentagon should avoid.—**R. JEFFREY SMITH**

NCI Tightens Security After Bomb Threat

Recent bomb threats from an unknown source have led to tightened security at the laboratories of the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. Robert Weinberg of the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has also been the target of threats. No bombs, however, have actually been found. Concern about violence by militant animal rights groups has heightened considerably after a University of Pennsylvania research laboratory was raided earlier this year.

For the past few months, Weinberg, a leading cancer researcher, has been cited in several letters making threats that were mailed to researchers in the United States and Britain and signed by an unknown group calling itself "Animal Liberation Front." The letters protest Weinberg's alleged use of laboratory animals in his research when, in fact, he uses tissue culture for experiments.

On 28 November, the cancer institute got a phone call from an editor of an Allentown, Pennsylvania, newspaper, who said that the paper had received a letter saying that an institute lab would be bombed to protest Weinberg's research. The letter was again signed by the Animal Liberation Front. Institute officials immediately alerted lab directors to be on the lookout for suspicious-looking packages. The institute's campus security is also patrolling the laboratories with attack dogs.

According to Weinberg, the letters are all apparently postmarked from the same area in Pennsylvania and are all typewritten on the same kind of stationery. In an interview, he played down the significance of the threats as the "reflections of a psychotic." John

Ray Molesworth, an agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, said the agency is not vigorously investigating threats against the cancer institute. "We literally get hundreds of bomb threat [cases] and we don't usually do anything unless a bomb is found."

—**MARJORIE SUN**

Farm Mechanization Suit Enters New Phase

A long-running legal battle over farm mechanization research at the University of California has entered a new phase. Last month, a California county judge redefined and narrowed the issues of the case. Both the university and the group that brought the suit are claiming they scored gains in his preliminary ruling.

In 1979, the California Rural Legal Assistance sued the university, charging that it improperly spent public funds for mechanization research that allegedly benefits only agribusiness. The group also claimed that the university violated federal land-grant law. The case raises broad issues about the social costs of innovation (*Science*, 30 March, p. 1368).

The case finally went to court last spring, but a mistrial was declared shortly thereafter because the judge became ill. Now a new judge has taken over the case and is deciding the legal issues to be tried.

Alameda County judge Ray Marsh raised a new issue by ruling that a university supported with federal land-grant funds must consider the interests of small farmers. The legal question is whether the university, in fact, carried out this obligation. Paul Barnett, a spokesman for the legal assistance group, says this indicates favorable consideration for the small farmer by the court.

Gary Morrison, the university's lead attorney on the case, calls Marsh's ruling "a novel interpretation of federal law." He says Marsh appears to be asking whether the university has a program to evaluate research. "We have an extensive process to do that," he says.

The legal assistance group also charges that federal law prohibits uni-