

AIDS Virus Has New Name—Perhaps

The name “human immunodeficiency virus” has been recommended for the AIDS virus, but some prominent dissent raises questions about its acceptance

AFTER more than a year of deliberations, an international committee—well, most of it anyway—made its recommendation of a new name for the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). The new name, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), is supposed to supplant the three names now in use. These are lymphadenopathy-associated virus (LAV), the designation given the virus by Luc Montagnier and his colleagues at the Pasteur Institute in Paris; human T-lymphotropic virus III (HTLV-III), the name chosen by Robert Gallo and his colleagues at the National Cancer Institute; and AIDS-associated retrovirus (ARV), the designation bestowed on the virus by Jay Levy of the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco and his colleagues.

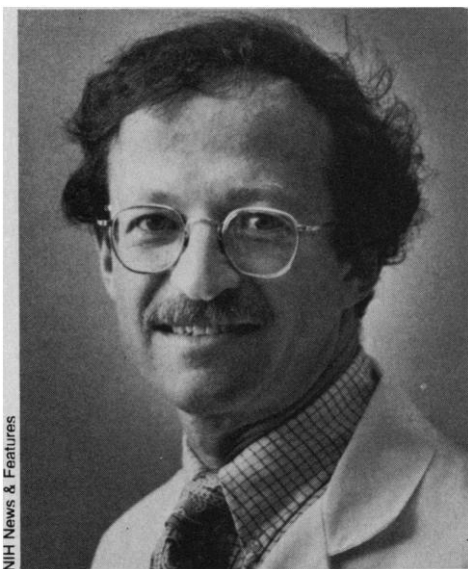
Although 11 of the 13 members of the committee, including Montagnier and Levy, signed the letter recommending the new name, which appears in this issue of *Science* and also in the 1 May issue of *Nature*, two committee members declined to do so. These are, perhaps not surprisingly, Gallo and Max Essex of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Disputes over viral nomenclature do not ordinarily command much attention beyond the individuals immediately involved in the fray. But the current dissension is part of a continuing controversy over who should get priority for discovering the AIDS virus that could provide 6 months of scripts for the television series “Dallas.” The main combatants are the Montagnier group, which in May 1983 described a single isolate of what eventually proved to be the causative virus of AIDS, and the Gallo group, which did not report on its isolates until April 1984 but then presented voluminous evidence linking HTLV-III to the disease. The Levy group did not weigh in until August 1984 with the ARV isolation.

The controversy features legal action in which the Pasteur Institute is suing the U.S. government over patent rights to the potentially very lucrative test kits for the AIDS virus that grew out of the original discoveries. The release of the nomenclature recommendation comes while negotiations aimed at settling the suit out of court are going on.

The possibility that loss of the HTLV-III designation might somehow alter the climate in favor of the French claims is one of the reasons why Gallo objects to publication of the letter now.

Moreover, Montagnier did not help matters any when he revealed the new name while giving a seminar at the National Institutes of Health on 16 April. Since reporters were present, the revelation soon became public; it appeared in the 19 April edition of the *Washington Post*, for one. Harold Varmus of the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco, who chaired



Harold Varmus, chairman of the nomenclature committee for the AIDS virus.

the nomenclature committee, was among those distressed by the premature revelation. At the time, he notes, no one other than himself and his secretary knew that the majority of committee members had actually ratified the choice or that publication of the letter was imminent.

According to Varmus, the nomenclature committee, which convened early in 1985 under the aegis of the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses, decided to choose a name for the AIDS virus that was not associated with any particular group and that would be in accord with common principles for naming viruses. The name “AIDS virus” was rejected because of the

fear that the disease engenders. The designation chosen reflects the origin of the virus—human—and one of its principal effects—immunodeficiency. Twelve members of the parent committee have approved the new name with votes from the remaining five still out.

Essex objects to the name HIV because he thinks that it reveals little or nothing about the nature of the virus and may even be confusing. Other viruses, including some such as cytomegalovirus and Epstein-Barr virus that were once considered as possible causes of AIDS, produce at least transient immune deficiencies. Moreover, Essex and his colleagues have recently identified a new human virus, which they are calling HTLV-IV. This virus, although distantly related to HTLV-III, does not appear to cause an immune deficiency.

Varmus suggests that this situation could be managed, however. The new virus, if it turns out to be closely enough related to the AIDS virus to receive the HIV family name, could be designated as HIV-NP where the NP stands for “nonpathogenic.”

Essex and Gallo also object to the name HIV because HTLV-III and LAV have been widely used both in the primary scientific literature and the more popular press. “The terms are so thoroughly engrained in the literature that it may be impossible to change them in the minds of people who use them,” Essex explains.

Gallo still prefers the name HTLV-III because of his view that it resembles the leukemia viruses HTLV-I and -II sufficiently to bear the same family name. However, many other investigators, notably including Montagnier, disagree, and this bone of contention has contributed both to the maintenance of the different names and to the initiation of the committee’s quest for a new one (*Science*, 22 March 1985, p. 1449).

In particular, the genome of HTLV-III shows little resemblance to those of HTLV-I and -II, although Gallo points out that a close genomic relation is not absolutely necessary for viruses to bear the same name. He cites as an example the case of hepatitis A virus, which has RNA as its genetic material and hepatitis B virus, which contains DNA.

Gallo and Essex both plan to continue

using the HTLV-III/LAV designation, but they do not completely rule out the possibility of ultimately switching to HIV. "It's not that I hate the name," Gallo says. "If it is accepted widely I would gravitate toward it." Essex expressed a similar sentiment.

Whether the new name will achieve widespread acceptance is unclear. The original letter from the nomenclature committee asked "that the editors of all journals that print this letter insist that published papers conform to these rules." *Science*, for one, has

not accepted this condition and deleted the request from the published letter. Even Varus concedes, "We're not a policing outfit. We can only strongly recommend that researchers use the name and that journals ask their authors to use it." ■ **JEAN L. MARX**

Library Cutbacks: An Information Deficit

After a severe budget cut this year, the Library of Congress fired staff, reduced cataloging, closed at night, and cast an envious eye at the Pentagon

THIS has not been a good season for the Library of Congress. Its budget was slashed in a double assault in February, once in a congressional gesture of self-sacrifice (3.5%), and then again in accordance with the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law (4.3%).

For the first time this century, the library has shut its doors most nights and on Sundays. A protest sprang up in March, and police chased members of a new group called "Books not Bombs" around the state-ly reading room. Meanwhile, the staff is falling behind in cataloging new material. Services to the blind and handicapped are frozen below the 1985 funding level. Scores of employees have been dismissed.

In addition, as luck would have it, the library's experimental book preservation plant caught fire twice in the last few months, and was all but destroyed in February. Then in April came the final insult: the drinking fountains went bad. Signs in the sleek new Madison building warn, "Water from these fountains is not potable." The plumbing—as well as the Picirian spring—seems to have broken down.

Understandably, chief librarian Daniel Boorstin began to speak in apocalyptic terms. It was a bit unusual, coming from an appointee of the Republican Ford Administration (1975). He delivered a Jeremiad at the House appropriations hearing in February, and it still echoes around Capitol Hill.

"Historians . . . will recall the last epoch of the Roman Empire when Romans were so fearful of the barbarians that they imitated the barbarians," Boorstin said. He pointed to the disparity between Congress's support of the military, amounting to \$300

billion a year, and its unwillingness to give the library \$18.3 million it wants to add to its \$220-million budget. "These are not the priorities of civilization and freedom," he chided. He called the cutbacks this year "antidemocratic and antiknowledge," in that they would make it harder for working people to use the library.

Boorstin argued that "knowledge is not simply another commodity," despite the fad for calling libraries information resource centers. Money spent on knowledge is not like other elements of the gross national product, he said, because "knowledge is never used up; it increases by diffusion." He begged the subcommittee to restore the cuts of 1986 in next year's budget in order to keep pace with the library's demands for collecting and cataloging new items. Otherwise, Boorstin said, 1986 would mark the beginning of the "disintegration of this great institution."

The blast hit home, with results Boorstin may not have expected. Coming at the same time as a 30% cut in reading room hours, it prompted a sharp public response. The most dramatic protest was the on-again off-again skirmish with the police in the library's main reading room that occurred sporadically over several weeks. Former Democratic presidential candidates Jesse Jackson and Eugene McCarthy showed up. McCarthy said the situation was deplorable, but not surprising. He added that the Lenin library in Moscow keeps longer hours (as do many libraries), and giped that the government is more interested in sending propaganda to Cuba than granting access to the library.

For a while, demonstrators trooped in at closing time, refused to budge, and got

arrested. But it is expensive to be arrested, and it costs the library something to make arrests. An appeal from the staff stressed this point, warning that continuing demonstrations would put off the day when the library could reopen at night. After a few weeks, the furor subsided.

A parallel skirmish took place in newspaper columns. Most writers, including three *Washington Post* columnists, took Boorstin's side. One *New Yorker* author, Susan Sheehan, praised the library as her office away from home. A local book author, Joseph Goulden, responded sourly to these encomiums, saying he could never find the books he wanted on the shelf. He scolded Sheehan for wasting his tax money and berated fellow scribblers for their "whines."

Congress has endorsed Boorstin's cause, in word if not yet in deed. Representative Vic Fazio (D-CA), chairman of the relevant appropriations committee in the House, and committee member Lindy Boggs (D-LA) told Boorstin they were delighted that he had launched a spirited campaign. Others agreed, filling the *Congressional Record* on 9 April—the middle of National Library Week—with supportive speeches. One skeptic raised a question, however.

Representative William Frenzel (R-MN) interrupted the library fest to ask whether Boorstin could not have found a way to cut the budget with less pain. After all, hours were reduced 30%, while the Gramm-Rudman law required a reduction of only 4.3%. "Whenever we reduce defense spending a little bit, the Secretary comes in and says that he will have to ground the Air Force and dock the Navy and fire the Army," said Frenzel. "I got the impression that that is what the librarian of Congress was doing." One congressional aide put it as follows: "The question is whether Boorstin's gamble will pay off. Will he irritate people into giving more money, or less?"

Boorstin declines to talk about this until his next appearance in Congress on 7 May. He did write to Frenzel, however, pointing out that the reduction in hours provided only about one-twentieth of the savings needed to meet the Gramm-Rudman requirements. These cuts seem to have been spread fairly evenly over the library's divi-