

A Soviet Human Genome Program?

The U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences is preparing to launch a "human genome" program and is considering a proposal to create an "institute of man," designed to bring together "all data on man as a biological and social being."

Details of the draft human genome program were presented last month to the annual general meeting of the Academy by Academician A. A. Bayed, who told the meeting that research into the human genome is expected to have a profound influence on the development of biology, according to a report on the meeting that appeared in the newspaper *Pravda*.

Soviet scientists have not been major contributors to mapping and sequencing studies published in international journals. However, they have published a certain amount of work on bacterial genomes and are currently known to be working on computational methods for analyzing DNA sequences.

In addition, there has recently been some speculation that Soviet scientists may ask to participate in the human genome sequencing project currently being debated by the U.S. National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy. ■ D.D.

Census Questions to Be Retained

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has backed off its proposal to eliminate about one-third of the questions originally planned for 1990 census forms—just in time for the 1 April deadline.

Last summer the OMB's regulatory affairs office, then headed by Wendy Lee Gramm, suggested that the census would be less "burdensome" to the public if about 30 questions were left off. Most of the items in question were on housing; they also included questions on fertility, migration, unemployment, and commuting.

Many protests ensued, from both government agencies and private organizations. At a 24 February hearing by the House Committee on Aging, OMB officials testified that they had received about 1000 letters of protest. According to congressional staff members, OMB officials acknowledged that no money would be saved by the cuts and no specific public support for the cuts could be cited.

On 15 March the Joint Economic Committee, chaired by Senator Paul Sarbanes

(D-MD) wrote President Reagan urging that the questions be retained. Finally, on 29 March the OMB announced it would accept most of the census bureau's original recommendations. The decision may have been facilitated by the fact that 2 months ago Gramm received an appointment as chairman of the Commodities Futures Trading Association and therefore relinquished her responsibility for monitoring the census forms. She has been replaced by deputy OMB director Joseph Wright. ■ C.H.

Nobelists Endorse SSC

Five Nobel Prize winners, all of them particle physicists, have appealed to President Reagan to move forward with the construction of the Superconducting Super Collider. The \$5.3-billion proton-proton particle collider is slated to begin operation in 1996, but it is doubtful that Congress will provide funds this year to start construction.

The appeal was made to Reagan on 30 March in a letter signed by Steven Weinberg, James Watson Cronin, Val Logsdon Fitch, Sheldon Lee Glashow, Burton Richter, and Samuel C. C. Ting. Weinberg read the letter aloud to Reagan and then handed it to the President at a pep rally for SSC supporters held in the Rose Garden on 30 March. Cronin, Richter, and Ting also were in attendance along with 39 students who had participated in a summer study program for high school students held at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

In a 7-minute talk, Reagan reaffirmed his support for the SSC, stating that the collider's construction could lead to new discoveries that will benefit the nation. "The United States must maintain the leading edge in science and technology, and building the world's largest particle accelerator is a visible symbol of our nation's determination to stay out front," Reagan said. ■

M.C.

U.S., Japan Hammer Out Science Agreement

The United States and Japan last week announced that they have reached an agreement in substance concerning scientific cooperation between the two countries. The agreement emphasizes the need to provide "comparable" access to each other's government-supported research.

The United States has been seeking to redress what it views as a lopsided relationship in scientific exchanges and technology transfer with Japan. Although Japanese scientists have had relatively easy access to

research here, few Americans have studied in Japan (*Science*, 1 January, p. 13; 31 July 1987, p. 476).

The new agreement, reached on 30 March, sets up a framework to provide better access. Each government will establish an interagency committee to track exchanges and recommend areas of joint research. The agreement lists broad fields of cooperation, such as advanced materials and information sciences.

The language includes provisions that would protect intellectual property rights and a pledge that each country will protect the use of classified information. The agreement assigns patent rights from any inventions arising from joint research to the host country, unless otherwise specified.

In response to Western criticism about limited access to its research, Japan, in the past several months, has announced several new programs to host foreign researchers at government laboratories. But most research in Japan is funded and conducted by private industry, so the new bilateral agreement is limited in remedying the imbalance.

The agreement is expected to be signed officially by President Reagan and Japanese Prime Minister Noburu Takeshita during the next 3 months, perhaps at the economic summit in June. ■ M.S.

Mathematicians Say No to SDI Funding

Members of the American Mathematical Society (AMS) have voted to keep the society at arm's length from the Strategic Defense Initiative. A motion directing the society to "lend no support to the Star Wars program," and to "make no efforts to obtain funding for Star Wars research or to mediate between agencies granting Star Wars funds and people seeking these funds" has been approved by a mail ballot in which 7,000 of the society's 20,000 members participated.

The referendum was initiated by an ad hoc committee of AMS members who gained enough signatures on a petition to require the society to poll all its members.

The motion began: "Many scientists consider SDI (commonly referred to as Star Wars) incapable of achieving its stated goals and dangerously destabilizing. Participation by universities and professional organizations lends a spurious scientific legitimacy to it." Fifty-seven percent of those who voted approved the motion, 33% voted against it, and 10% abstained. Other motions on the ballot urged more support for nonmilitary mathematics research, individual investigators, and basic research. They were approved overwhelmingly. ■ C.N.