Shakeup Continues at Soviet Academy

The Soviet Academy of Sciences is to make a significant reduction in the size of its central administration, cutting the payroll from 1037 to 700 staff members as part of current attempts to decentralize its activities and increase the autonomy given to scientific institutes and laboratories.

The staff cuts were approved at a General Assembly of the Academy in Moscow last month. The meeting, which had been postponed from a previously scheduled date in mid-September, also elected physicist Andrei Sakharov to the academy's governing council and endorsed new rules encouraging competitive bidding for research grants, which will be introduced at the beginning of next year (*Science*, 7 October, p. 23).

Academy President Guri Marchuk told the meeting that the purpose of the new procedures was to shift the center of gravity of the academy's scientific activity to individual laboratories. "It is in those scientific laboratories that new ideas are really born," he said later in a radio interview.

In line with recent efforts to rejuvenate the academy's top echelons, three former vice presidents over the age of 75 had agreed to resign for reasons of age. Following the recent death of a fourth vice president, biologist Yuri Ovchinnikov, and the decision to split his former responsibilities for chemistry and biology into two positions, five new vice presidents were elected:

- Yuri Ossipyan (57), head of the Institute of Solid State Physics, president of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics, and one of the chief coordinators of Soviet research in high-temperature superconductivity;
- Chemist Oleg Nefedov (57), the originator of more than 100 inventions in organic chemistry who directs a laboratory of the academy's Institute of Organic Chemistry;
- Rem Petrov (58), an immunologist specializing in the human effects of ionizing radiation, and director of the academy's Institute of Immunology in Moscow;
- Nikolai Laverov (58), a geophysicist who works on the theory of the formation of uranium deposits, and is currently president of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kirghizia; and
- Vladimir Kudryavstev (65), a specialist in the legal basis of socialist states, and director of the academy's Institute of State and Law, as well as vice president of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers.

Individuals elected to the 47-member Praesidium of the Soviet Academy, included Georgiy Arbatov, an expert on the United States; Georgiy Golitsyn, one of the U.S.S.R.'s top specialists in the climatic consequences of nuclear war; and economist Leonid Abalkin, in addition to Sakharov.

Unlike previous elections, in which all candidates had been selected in advance by the Praesidium and merely endorsed by the General Meeting, this time candidates could be put forward by academy members at the time of the elections themselves (as happened with the nomination of Sakharov).

Ossipyan, a member of a special committee that has been set up by the academy to combat excessive bureaucracy in the administration of science, was reported by the news agency TASS to have said that new voting procedures were evidence that the academy was beginning to tackle the problem of "red tape."

He defined red tape in science as "primarily the substitution of real work for the appearance of it, when the observance of a multitude of formalities becomes sufficient in itself for the researcher to the detriment of achieving a specific result." Ossipyan also announced that restrictions on publishing the results of research on high-temperature superconductors have recently been removed. In the past, he said, the area was classified as being important for defense.

The meeting endorsed the new priority being given to research on environmental problems. Academy vice president Konstantin Frolov had, a few days earlier, proposed to British Education Secretary Kenneth Baker that Britain and the U.S.S.R. establish a joint ecological research institute to study problems such as the mathematical modeling of pollution in large cities.

The meeting also approved unanimously the reinstatement of Nikolai Bukharin, a key figure in the development of the history of science, who was director of the academy's Institute of the History of Science and Technology from 1930 until his exclusion from the academy and subsequent disappearance in 1937 as a result of his opposition to Stalin's policies.

Bukharin is best known in Western academic circles for a paper presented to an international congress held in London in 1931 on the social background to the work of Isaac Newton. This paper stimulated a new school of social historians of science in Britain, including individuals such as J. D. Bernal and Joseph Needham.

Following his reinstatement, academy president Marchuk said that Bukarin's expulsion had been "a deplorable event in the history of our association, a deed which we had to correct." ■ DAVID DICKSON

France Boosts AIDS Funds

Paris

Following several months of uncertainty, the French government last week announced a substantial increase in support for research into the causes and prevention of AIDS. It also said it intends to set up a national scientific committee to oversee the distribution of these funds and improve the coordination of research efforts.

The announcement was made by health minister Claude Evin as part of a broad new anti-AIDS program. A total of $25 million will be allocated in 1989 to AIDS research, a figure that will bring France in line with the amount being spent in, for example, Britain and Germany, Evin said. Pointing out that French research workers had been the first to isolate the AIDS virus, Evin said that "both health needs, and the industrial and scientific stakes, mean that it is now essential to move into a higher gear."

In addition to increasing the funding for research, the government will step up spending on AIDS prevention campaigns next year by a factor of 4 (to a total of $16 million). A new 15-member National AIDS Committee will be created to oversee these campaigns, as well as the types of treatment that should be offered to AIDS patients and those who test positive for the AIDS virus.

Evin also stressed that the precise form of the new scientific council, whose members have not yet been announced, will depend on what type of interaction is envisaged with research organizations in other European nations, since it was important that the enhanced French program should be designed as part of a broader European effort.

The announcement, which had been widely expected, has met with widespread approval in the scientific community, where there had been fears that, without a coordinated national strategy, France was in danger of losing its early lead in AIDS research to other countries, in particular Great Britain and West Germany (*Science*, 28 October, p. 509).

Luc Montagnier of the Pasteur Institute, for example, one of the government's most vocal critics in recent months, said that "this is a very welcome increase, even if the total amount is still not very large compared to the U.S. effort."

■ DAVID DICKSON