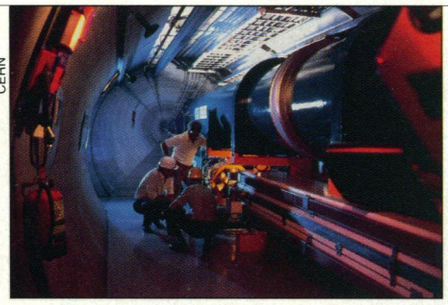
SCIENCESCOPE

edited by RICHARD STONE

Is There Life After SSC? Oui

After Congress killed the planned Superconducting Super C-ollider (SSC) last month, U.S. physicists conceded defeat in a race to build a particle accelerator big enough to refine theories of the fundamental nature of matter. But now their European competitors are dangling a consolation prize: an invitation to help build the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Switzerland.

The SSC would've been more powerful than the $2 billion LHC, which the CERN lab in Geneva expects to have operating by 2000. But now that the SSC is history, several U.S. physicists at a meeting of a federal High Energy Physics Advisory Panel last week began advocating a U.S. role in the European machine.



CERN

SSC successor? LHC mock-up at CERN may draw more than U.S. physicists' curiosity.

Luckily for the yanks, it appears the Europeans are seeking their presence. "If the U.S. is interested, they can join....It's up to them," says physicist Lorenzo Foa, who will become CERN's research chief next summer. Foa told *Science* that the United States wouldn't necessarily have to buy a CERN membership, which would run several hundred million dollars a year in dues. "We don't want people to think we want the U.S. just for their money," he says. Rather, Foa says, CERN wants to tap into the U.S. scientific talent now in post-SSC limbo.

But will U.S. officials embrace a supporting role? White House science adviser Jack Gibbons says it's a possibility. "It would be silly for us not to engage in dialogue on an international level," he says. And the academic community appears ready to transcend transatlantic differences. "I think it's critical at this point that our vision of leadership be modest," says Fermilab director John Peoples, recently appointed director of the SSC termination.

UnWellcome News for Irish Scientists

Scientists in the Republic of Ireland—already suffering from government funding cuts—now may lose another pot of research gold. The Wellcome Trust, a London-based biomedical research foundation, is threatening to cut off Irish researchers unless their government quits taxing Wellcome grants.

The trust has about $6 million worth of grants now committed to Irish research (some grants last up to 5 years)—compared to $525 million in Great Britain. That's no trivial amount, considering the Irish government's entire research budget is just $5.85 million in 1993, down from $7 million 2 years ago.

Moreover, in the past few years, Wellcome has been investing big money in Irish researchers with international reputations. These include geneticist Peter Humphreys of Trinity College in Dublin, who received a $1.65 million grant for work on the molecular biology of retinitis pigmentosa, a common inherited visual disorder. If Wellcome ceased funding Irish researchers, "it would virtually wipe out medical research in those [grant] areas," contends physicist Michael Hopkins of Dublin City University, head of the Irish Research Scientists Association, a lobby group formed earlier this year.

But Wellcome officials are fuming over a 21% value-added tax (VAT) the foundation must pay on all services, equipment, and supplies that Irish researchers buy with grant money. The existing Wellcome grants have incurred a total of $165,000 in Irish VAT fees—enough to spur Wellcome director Bridget Ogilvie, in a letter last week to Irish finance minister Bertie Ahern, to demand that the Irish government exempt grants from VAT or lose the funding altogether.

An official in Ireland's finance ministry contacted by *Science* declined to discuss the Wellcome letter and the government's response to it.

Yale Engineers Spared The Guillotine

For 2 years, Yale engineering researchers have fretted over whether their jobs would fall to a proposed cost-cutting plan. Now, suddenly, their future looks more secure: Yale president Richard Levin has shelved a recommendation to eliminate seven engineering faculty posts.

In January 1992, a Yale faculty committee, appointed by former Yale president Benno Schmidt Jr. to advise the university on how to respond to diminishing resources, released a "restructuring" report that called on Yale to eliminate 65 to 75 faculty positions through attrition in the 1990s (*Science*, 24 January 1992, p. 398). The recommendations—which included merging the chemical, electrical, and mechanical engineering departments—drew criticism from many faculty and graduate students and "lots of interest from alumni," says applied physics professor Werner Wolf.

Schmidt resigned 5 months after the plan was announced, but the restructuring report lingered. So last April, Yale provost Judith Rodin appointed a panel, composed of eight outside engineering professors and three members of the Yale faculty, to review the engineering program. The panel concluded that the program was "outstanding." Yale engineering may not have the depth of MIT or Stanford, says Stanford engineering dean and panel member James Gibbons, "but there's a tremendous opportunity for Yale to establish one of the few top engineering schools in an environment that's largely humanities and social sciences," he says. Rather than cut faculty, the panel said, Yale should step up plans to recruit researchers.

Weighing the two conflicting reports, Levin, appointed Yale president in July, decided last week against merging the departments. He also announced that Yale would hire four junior faculty members in chemical and electrical engineering.

Pharmaceutical Scientists Seek a Voice

The debate over health care reform—and the threat of drug price controls—has featured plenty of jawboning from policy wonks representing the pharmaceutical industry. Now the scientists themselves want a piece of the action: As part of a campaign against price controls, the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS) is developing a strategy to "educate the public" on drug development.

The drug designers have good reason to be concerned about the future. So far, 12 pharmaceutical firms have announced plans to trim about 500 Ph.D. positions by 1996 (*Science*, 24 September, p. 1788). The downsizing has roused AAPS to action, says University of Mississippi pharmaceutical scientist and AAPS member Kent Summers. "When people start losing jobs, you get their attention," he says.

This past March, responding to the scientists' concern, Summers conducted a survey among AAPS members asking how they thought AAPS has dealt with health care issues. The overwhelming response, Summers says, was that the AAPS "wasn't doing a good job." The AAPS got similar feedback at its meeting in Orlando earlier this week.

Many AAPS scientists say the public understands little about drug development, from searching for drug candidates to refining delivery systems. Having received a green light from its membership, AAPS plans to have an "action plan" for educating the public by January.