edited by RICHARD STONE

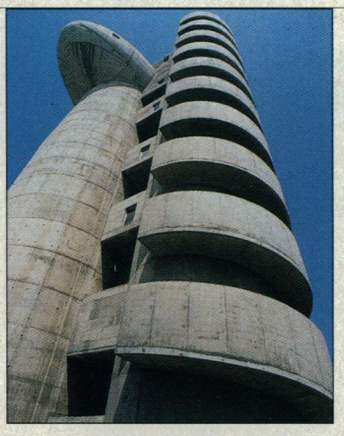
Strike Threatens Israeli Academic Research

Even in strike-prone Israel, a labor dispute that has crippled the country's seven major universities is a doozy. Entering its 9th week, the strike has halted all teaching, eliminating most of a semester for more than 40,000 students. Now the strike jeopardizes academic research: The government is threatening to shut down the universities altogether.

Unhappy with their salaries, the 4500 faculty of Israel's seven state-run universities quit teaching in early January. Academic researchers earn half the pay of scientists in comparable industry jobs, according to the Israel National Association of University Professors. Most scientists, the association says, "must moonlight,or go abroad for extended periods to make ends meet." Because of the strike, Israeli faculty haven't been paid since mid-January.

But academic research has continued so far because much of it is underwritten by industry, foundations, and foreign agencies. At Tel Aviv University, for example, faculty have been meeting research deadlines for outside grants despite the strike, says spokesman Yoram Shamir.

Nevertheless, research could be headed for trouble. Government officials, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, have publicly threatened to close the schools if faculty persist in refusing to teach. Shamir and others foresee a prolonged struggle. "It may be very difficult to save the academic year," he says.



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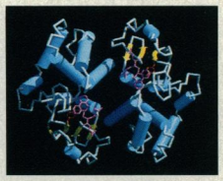
Trouble looming. Faculty strike could affect research at Weizmann and other Israeli universities.

Lobbying Backfires on LBL, Berkeley

It wasn't supposed to happen like this. For the past few years, researchers at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory (LBL) and the University of California (UC), Berkeley, have lobbied federal officials to fund nanoscale molecular design—synthesizing molecules with potential applications in electronics, biomedicine, and materials science. And last fall they were ready to celebrate after Congress authorized the Office of Naval Research (ONR) to spend $10 million on a competition to create a molecular design institute "combining the talents of a multidisciplinary research laboratory and a preeminent research university."



NIST

Enzyme by design. Human GST.

But after convincing Congress that the field is important, Berkeley officials have now renounced their victory to avoid appearing to benefit from a belt-tightening measure announced by ONR officials. Last month, ONR decided the only way to pay for the new institute and two other congressional mandates totalling $11.5 million was to cut existing grants to thousands of university researchers—including dozens at UC Berkeley—by an average of 10%. LBL and Berkeley have responded by pledging to abstain from seeking any project that would be financed, in effect, by a tax on their colleagues. "We told everybody that [the nanoscale project] should be new money," says biochemist Mark Alper, associate head of the materials science division at LBL. "So we have decided not to compete in any competition that takes money away from existing research grants."

ONR officials say they had to cut somewhere to fund the new projects because their budget is shrinking, from $430 million in 1993 to a requested $408 million in 1995. "[The earmarks] came out of the blue and there was no way we could try to smooth things out," says Bruce Robinson, ONR's deputy director for science and technology. "It's the largest cut we've ever had to take."

Found: Missing Link Between Genetics and Anthropology

Geneticists who study human evolution don't run with the "stones-and-bones" crowd at physical anthropology meetings, nor do they claim kinship with medically oriented peers who study diseases. That's why these hybrid scientists are forming their own professional phylum: On 29 March, the group plans to launch the Association of Anthropological Genetics.

These scientists use molecular biology to trace the origins and migrations of human populations, as well as environmental effects on human biology. Their ranks have swelled in recent years, and according to Michael Crawford, an anthropological geneticist at the University of Kansas, the new association is a sign that there may be enough of them to change the way scientists study human genetic evolution.

In addition to a new society, anthropological geneticists have staged a friendly takeover of *Human Biology*. Crawford became editor of the monthly in 1989 and began soliciting papers in the field, such as a special issue on the peopling of the Americas. The group is organizing in Denver on 29 March, 1 day before the start of the annual meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists. For more info, contact Crawford at crawford@ukanvax.ukan.edu.

ORI Clears Lead Scientist of Misconduct

For more than a decade, University of Pittsburgh psychiatrist Herbert Needleman has battled allegations that he deliberately skewed data on the effects of lead on children's intelligence. Now Needleman has emerged exonerated, although bearing one visible scar: Last week the federal Office of Research Integrity (ORI) found he had not committed scientific misconduct, but asked him to publish several corrections.

In 1979, Needleman reported a link between exposure to low lead levels and IQ deficits in young children. The study later helped guide federal policy on lead. However, in 1981 psychologists Claire Ernhart of Case Western Reserve University and Sandra Scarr of the University of Virginia claimed the work was flawed (*Science*, 23 August 1991, p. 842). A decade later, a Pitt review panel cleared Needleman of misconduct but recommended he publish corrections noting possible errors in selecting and reporting the study population.

ORI began its investigation 18 months ago. In a 3 March letter to Needleman, ORI endorsed Pitt's recommendations, and detailed additional errors that it argues should be corrected, including misplotted points and "misleading" descriptions of results. But ORI failed to find an intent to deceive, says ORI director Lyle Bivens, which is necessary to prove a misconduct charge. Therefore, he says, "we're not in the position to require [Needleman] to do anything."

Needleman says he's pleased with the ruling. "It's taken them a long time to come to the right conclusion," he says. Needleman says he hasn't decided whether to publish the corrections.

Ernhart, his chief accuser, also claims a victory of sorts. Given the importance of Needleman's work to public health, Ernhart says, "having [ORI] acknowledge that [the research] was not correctly done is an important piece of information."