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ALEXANDER/BLACK STAR

Grounded. German creditors are impounding Russian research vessels to settle claims.

Russian Ships Collide With Creditors

Russia's Shirshov Institute of Oceanology in Moscow has been learning capitalism the hard way. Earlier this month, its research ship *Akademik Ioffe* sailed out of Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, free again after more than 2 months' impoundment while the institute argued in court over disputed debts to four German companies for repairs to another Shirshov ship, the *Sergei Vavilov*. Lawyers representing the Shirshov Institute handed over a $390,000 check as security for the ship until the case comes to court, and the *Ioffe* immediately set sail for Kaliningrad.

Meanwhile, another creditor, the tourist company Freidrich Sanger, seized yet another Shirshov ship, the *Akademik Nikolay Strakhov*, in Hamburg harbor on 20 May. The Strakhov was released on 16 June after another German travel company agreed to pay a security on the debt in exchange for free use of the ship.

Leonid Savostin, director of the Shirshov Institute, blames one of the creditors, Polar-Schiffahrts Consulting, for the money problems and accuses it of "improper behavior." It was while the *Vavilov* was chartered to Polar-Schiffahrts' daughter company, Polar Shipping, that the debts were incurred, and Savostin says that Polar-Schiffahrts should be responsible for all the debts. In the meantime, Savostin must be wondering where in the world it is safe for his ships to berth.

White House Battles Defense Cuts

The White House has belatedly gone to bat for defense-funded university research in an attempt to restore a $900-million cut imposed last month by the House of Representatives (*Science*, 1 July, p. 22). In letters sent on 6 July to the House and Senate defense appropriations subcommittees, John Gibbons, the president's science adviser, argued that military research has provided for the nation's security, strengthened its economy, and helped to train the next generation of scientists. This would be threatened, wrote Gibbons, if the 50% cut proposed by Representative John Murtha (D–PA) is not overturned.

The letters are the first official White House response to Murtha's surprise attack on university research. The Senate panel is scheduled to mark up its version of the spending bill on 26 July; even if funds are restored, however, they must survive a meeting between the House and Senate later this summer to iron out differences in the two bills.

Cutbacks in European Science Aid Reversed

A U.S.–Eastern European project on science and technology—axed earlier this year by sweeping cuts in the Administration's proposed budget (*Science*, 11 February, p. 743)—may now be back, thanks in part to a rescue mission led by Representative George Brown (D–CA), chairman of the House Science Committee.

Exactly why the $4.3-million Eastern Europe program fell into Adminstration disfavor remains unclear. In the past, it has been popular in Congress because costs are matched by the host countries—the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland—where a few hundred thousand dollars can support dozens of projects, collaborations, and exchanges. But the effort fell between budget areas within the State Department, leaving it without an internal champion.

All that changed after the embassies of the four nations complained loudly and bitterly, and Brown started applying some pressure of his own. Finally the Administration gave in. In a 17 June letter to Brown, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said he was restoring the programs (minus some $500,000 earmarked for the former Yugoslavia), mainly with Agency for International Development funds.

Alternative Medicine Chief Calls It Quits

In October 1992, pediatrician Joseph Jacobs took over a new office at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—the Office of Alternative Medicine—created by Congress to investigate acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, and other therapies that don't fit the standard NIH mold. As director, Jacobs oversees a $2-million research grants program. But now, after a stormy 20 months at the helm, Jacobs is ready to quit. He told *Science* he will leave NIH "by the end of September" to pursue a career in academia.

Outsiders say that Jacobs ran afoul of the activists who lobbied to create the alternative medicine program. According to Ralph Moss, editor of *The Cancer Chronicles* and an advocate of nontraditional therapies, Jacobs had "acrimonious" dealings with Moss and other ad hoc advisers over priorities for research. They wanted Jacobs to devote more time and money to investigating controversial therapies—such as the use of shark cartilage to treat cancer and arthritis, a topic Jacobs included under duress in the first round of research awards. For the most part, Moss argues, the NIH office has chosen to research "soft" topics less likely to offend the biomedical establishment. In addition, according to Moss, Jacobs objected to having some of the activists included on a permanent advisory board to his office.

Joseph Jacobs

Jacobs declined to give his reasons for leaving, other than to say NIH should "bring in new blood before I spill my own." But now that he's experienced political pressure firsthand, he says he's developed a deeper appreciation of "academic freedom," which he hopes to enjoy soon at a university far from NIH.

A Job Shop for U.K. Women Scientists

For Britain's women scientists, the struggle for career advancement in a male-dominated profession may be getting a bit easier. The U.K. Office of Science and Technology is planning to set up a special office devoted to helping women advance in science, engineering, and technology. Among its services: a central catalog of personnel databases for matching available women scientists with jobs, and a program to encourage organizations to set up databases of their own. The two-person Development Unit, according to Science Minister William Waldgreve, who announced its creation last week, will also "monitor progress" of the U.K. Research Councils in improving the lot of women scientists funded as contract staff at universities. The aim is to create more part-time positions for women with family commitments, more posts for researchers returning after a baby break, and provisions for maternity (and paternity) leave for researchers on short-term contracts—a group that makes up one third of the academic research workforce.

Officials don't expect this to be easy. The first hitch: maternity leave. The Medical Research Council's contracts, for example, provide maternity benefits in line with the employing university's rules. But most universities only offer such benefits after a researcher has been in a post for at least 2 years—longer than many contracts. "Who should pay for maternity benefits is going to be the major sticking point," predicts Ted Nield, spokesperson for the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals.