

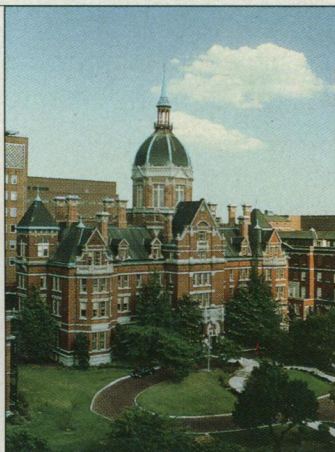
edited by JOCELYN KAISER

Postdocs of Johns Hopkins Unite

Within a few days, the heads of research labs at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine will get a surprise from their dean: a memorandum prodding them to increase the salaries of underpaid postdocs.

The memo is a victory chalked up by what may be the nation's first organization of postdoctoral fellows to gain a voice in setting university policy. The Johns Hopkins Postdoctoral Association was formed 2 years ago to lobby administrators for more uniform salaries and benefits. This fall, says President Ora Weisz, a fifth-year postdoc in cell biology, it became an official Hopkins organization. Of 800 postdocs at Hopkins, half earn less than the salaries set by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for individual postdoctoral fellowships, Weisz says. And not all postdocs have health insurance benefits.

The Hopkins advisory board appointed a subcommittee last year to study postdocs' concerns and recently approved guidelines to improve pay and benefits. Now Dean Michael E. Johns has agreed to write a memo informing lab chiefs about the guidelines. The memo will request an explanation if some postdocs earn less than the NIH minimum, which ranges from \$19,600



JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS

Call for change. Postdocs at Johns Hopkins want to remedy disparities in pay and benefits.

for first-year fellows to \$25,000 or more for third-year and up.

No one expects immediate change, though, especially as investigators are often hard pressed to maintain stipends when NIH reduces a grant, Weisz says. Says biophysics department chair Jeremy Berg, who headed the subcommittee, "It's clearly something that has to be phased in." Next on the postdocs' agenda: support for training for postdocs who want to get out of research.

NSF Sheds Planning Office

Streamlining bureaucracy is a key ingredient in the Clinton Administration's plan to "reinvent" the federal government. And Neal Lane, director of the National Science Foundation

(NSF), appears to have taken that as a cue in deciding last week to abolish the 15-person Office of Planning and Assessment (OPA) within the director's office. Lane has put Anne Petersen, NSF deputy director, in charge of foundationwide assessment activities as head of a working group that includes NSF's seven assistant directors. That leaves OPA staffers scrambling to fill other jobs at the foundation or to find work elsewhere, says Joel Widder, director of legislative and public affairs. OPA had been without a director since last spring, when Chuck Brownstein took leave to work for an area think tank specializing in information systems, and last week his deputy, Peter House, was detailed to the Smithsonian Institution for a project on electronic communications.

House was the author of a controversial 1987 report, produced for then-NSF Director Erich Bloch, that projected a "shortfall" of 675,000 scientists and engineers. Coincidentally, that report, since repudiated by NSF and the target of a congressional inquiry, was featured in a *Newsweek* article last week about rising unemployment among Ph.D.s. Although the magazine said the report spawned "The Myth" of a scientist shortfall, the demise of the office that generated it is real.

O'Leary Stands Up for DOE

The Clinton White House is eager to get a jump on a new Republican Congress hungry for big cuts in the federal bureaucracy. Word has spread that the Department of Energy (DOE) is among agencies that the Office of Management and Budget may put on the chopping block. In response, Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary has gone on the offensive.

The secretary insists she is not battling to save her department, but she warns that reshuffling the bureaucracy will not do away with its necessary tasks. "It doesn't serve any of us well to focus on the institution," she told reporters this week. "When it comes to our science and technology and national security efforts, those missions must be performed."

O'Leary adds that during her tenure, the department has come up with over \$10 billion in savings for the next 5 years through such measures as reforming the DOE's environmental management and private contracting. She is clearly making those arguments to her bosses: "I have been in constant communication" with the White House, she says. Meanwhile, the secretary intends to shake up her department. Senior DOE officials say O'Leary will soon announce a major effort to streamline the organization, a plan in the works since before the November elections.

As for the new Congress, O'Leary predicts that it will be difficult to win approval for new science projects like the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, which has not drawn much public support. "Every year it is getting tougher and tougher for large projects," says O'Leary. "And we in the community have been talking too much to ourselves, then running after our legislators. That's not the way to do business."



Hazel O'Leary

Russian Science Ministry Tries to Outwit Academy

No fewer than three rival laws that would grant special status to scientists and create a new science policy are now vying for approval in the lower house of the Russian parliament, the Duma. Bureaucratic hold-ups are likely to delay a vote until next year. But the Ministry of Science, author of one of the laws, appears to be trying to outmaneuver its rival for control of the country's research, the Russian Academy of Sciences, by getting the substance of its draft law adopted by presidential decree.

A parliamentary hearing on several proposed science laws was scheduled for the end of November (*Science*, 18 November, p. 1153). Now it has been put off until late December at the earliest, while the Duma's science subcommittee tries to hammer out a composite version of the proposals, says subcommittee chair Nikolai Vorontsov.

As the parliament considers its options, science minister Boris Saltykov has been circulating a "national scientific doctrine," formally presenting it 2 weeks ago at a meeting of science ministry officials. The document, little more than a shortened version of the ministry's draft law, defines state policies on access to scientific information, competition for grants, and funding for the scientific academies.

Saltykov's aim is to get the document passed by presidential decree. In an interview with *Science*, Saltykov denied that he was lobbying for the ministry's law. "The main purpose of the document was to give scientists the feeling that the state needs their work and has a clear idea of what this work is and how it should be supported," he says. Whatever the minister's intentions may be, Vorontsov points out, the Duma's law will take precedence.