

RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Australian to Tend U.K. Science

Britain's top science policy job has gone to an Australian-born mathematical biologist who has spent much of his career in the United States. Robert May will be Prime Minister John Major's chief scientific adviser and head of the Office of Science and Technology. May, currently Royal Society research professor at the University of Oxford and Imperial College London, succeeds Sir William Stewart, who retired earlier this month.

"It's splendid news for science," says John Lawton, director of the Centre for Population Biology at Imperial College. "He's almost unique in training as a theo-

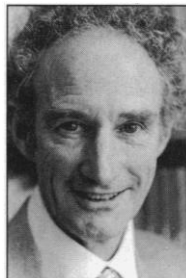
retical physicist before switching to biology. Very few people span his range of abilities," which extend from ecosystems modeling to epidemiology and include such intellectual excursions as applying chaos theory and nonlinear dynamics to biological phenomena.

May began his research career at the University of Sydney and then moved to the United States, where he was a professor of biology at Princeton University until 1988, when he took up his

post in the United Kingdom. Lawton says "ecologists will particularly welcome" the appoint-

ment of May, who has been a vocal champion of the importance of biodiversity and who is also chair of the board of trustees at London's Natural History Museum.

Basic research will also have a friend in a high place, because, according to Lawton, May is "passionate about fundamental science rather than short-termism." This passion may help allay fears that the government is moving away from basic science.



Robert May

Russian Mathematical Rift

The Euler International Mathematical Institute (EIMI) in St. Petersburg, founded as a post-communist haven for Russian mathematics, has been less of a safe harbor than a troubled sea. In the process of an unsettling reorganization (*Science*, 5 May, p. 627), the institute has been further rocked by a recommendation that its deputy chief be fired.

Last Tuesday (13 June) the Russian Academy of Sciences, which set up the institute, recommended that Sergei Khrushchev, one of the key figures in its cre-

ation, be dismissed. Khrushchev has been engaged in a long-running battle with institute head Ludwig Faddeev over the institute's autonomy. But the last straw apparently came when Khrushchev barred visiting scientists from attending two international conferences at the institute, saying that the meeting had not been properly organized.

Faddeev says the conflict has been brewing for about a year, escalating in March when the Mathematical Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences decided to fold EIMI into the St. Petersburg branch of the Steklov Institute. This move was pro-

posed to open EIMI up to more participation by local mathematicians and give them access to more computer facilities. But Khrushchev, who says he wants EIMI to remain an elite and independent international center, adamantly opposed the plan. He mobilized a campaign against the merger on the Internet, accusing Faddeev of "ruining" EIMI by selling out to the academy. He has also charged the chief with bad management and "financial intrigues" with a U.S. company that was laying optical cables for the institute.

Faddeev denies Khrushchev's accusations, noting that EIMI will stay in its building and will only be "subordinated administratively" to the academy. "The only thing I regret is that the Euler Institute got separated from the local scientific community," he says. Twenty St. Petersburg mathematicians have sided with Faddeev and have created a petition in his support on the local computer network.

Khrushchev claims that the decision to get rid of him is part of Faddeev's strategy for gaining complete control of the institute. It now appears that he's lost the battle, and will be dismissed even before the transition is completed in August.

Global "Claptrap"?

Reporters recently got a taste of how leadership in the House Science Committee feels about the credibility of reports about global warming: skeptical. At a meeting with members of the press to talk about the fate of the Energy Department, Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) said that, as chair of the subcommittee on energy and environment, he intends to put a stop to wasteful research on "trendy science," which, he said, "has cost us billions." Some climate research, he indicated, is definitely in that category. And "nowhere is scientific nonsense more evident than in global-warming programs that are sprinkled throughout the current year budget." But, said Rohrabacher, "There's a new gang in town. ... Our '96 budget does not operate on the assumption that global warming is a proven phenomenon. In fact, it is assumed at best to be unproven and at worst to be liberal claptrap, trendy, but soon to go out of style in our Newt Congress."

AAU's Pings Back in the Fold

Cornelius Pings may not be the preference of members of the National Academy of Engineers, who surprised observers this spring by electing a petition candidate, Harold Liebowitz, as their president over Pings, the official nominee (*Science*, 21 April, p. 359). But he suits the Association of American Universities (AAU), which is keeping the defeated candidate at its helm.

Pings, who became AAU president in February 1993, announced last fall that he was running for the NAE post and would resign in June. AAU formed a search committee, identified a potential successor, and made him an offer. But soon after Pings lost the election, the chosen candidate withdrew. So AAU asked Pings if he wanted to keep his job, and he jumped at the chance.

The reappointment of Pings, 66, to a 3-year term in effect restores his original 5-year agreement with the association. And he says the "radical changes" on Capitol Hill will be more than enough to keep him occupied.



RUSSIAN SCIENCE

6 June
Library of Congress

"We are not prepared to continue economic reform at the expense of science, culture, and education. Science can't wait. It would disappear. It's melting like snow in the sun."

—Economist Grigory Yavlinsky, member of Russian parliament and reform candidate for president, at meeting of the International Science Foundation