

the July publication date. Some feel this defeats the object of the review as a public information exercise.

More generally, there are feelings that the government would not seriously contemplate calling a halt to the plant whatever the outcome of the hearings. The formal licensing procedure was begun in 1977, and although it has now almost ground to a halt,

it is thought that the Lower Saxony government would be unlikely to stop it abruptly. Even if licensing were now to proceed as fast as possible, it would be 1981 before it were completed. What seems most likely, therefore, is a 'vague' decision.

Whilst the critics and nuclear industry are discussing the Gorleben proposals next week, the people of Gorle-

ben, who do not have an invitation to the hearings, will be taking part in a demonstration march from Gorleben to Hanover. The Lower Saxony government is expecting the affair to be violent for it is reported that 100 prisoners have been transferred from local gaols to make way for the recalcitrant villagers.

Judy Redfearn

US panel approves research on *in vitro* fertilisation

THE US is likely to end a three-year moratorium on research on the *in vitro* fertilisation of human ova following the conclusions of a federal advisory board that there are no ethical objections to such research being carried out on federal funds.

The ethics advisory board was established last year by Mr Joseph A. Califano Jr, Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, to advise him on whether work along the lines of the British research workers Mr Patrick Steptoe and Dr Robert Edwards should be permitted to proceed in the US. On reaching its conclusion, however, the board declined to say whether it felt that such research should in fact receive federal support.

Having heard evidence from scientists, religious leaders, anti-abortion groups, infertile couples and others, the board recommended that the work should be permitted provided that a number of requirements were met. These include:

- that research be aimed primarily at establishing the safety and efficacy of procedures for *in vitro* fertilisation;

- that no embryo be sustained in laboratory conditions for more than 14 days;

- that both the participants in the research—which would include clinical trials—and the public be informed if there is any evidence that such research is having ill-effects.

Although these provisions, and the decision to recommend that the moratorium be lifted, were agreed unanimously by the 13-member board of lawyers, scientists and others, there was less agreement on the priority which *in vitro* fertilisation should be given as a research topic.

Several members suggested that it should come low on the national priority list, and one suggested that the government should not fund any such research. Others disagreed, claiming that the research might soon become a "high priority" if there is wide demand from doctors to adopt the new techniques.

The board therefore agreed not to recommend whether HEW should fund such research, accepting that in addition to ethical concerns, this also

raised scientific, economic and political considerations.

Funds for 'test-tube baby' research have been held up for more than three years in anticipation of the advisory board's report, although the members of the board were only announced last summer. Congress placed a total ban on all research involving fetuses in 1974, and although this ban was lifted one year later, the position with respect to *in vitro* fertilisation has remained uncertain.

The only application at present lodged with HEW for carrying out such research is from Dr Pierre Soupart of Vanderbilt University, who has been waiting since 1975. The ethics board suggests that Dr Soupart's application now be forwarded to the National Institutes of Health for scientific review.

The board also recommended that the secretary of HEW should encourage, and even possibly provide financial support for, the development of a model law outlining the legal status of children born as a result of *in vitro* fertilisation. □

Spanish universities unhappy with new autonomy law

SPAIN'S universities have long sought autonomy from government control—and they should achieve it as one of the first actions of Spain's new government. But it may not prove to be the prize once dreamed of.

The first duty of the new government will be to debate the laws outlined in Spain's new constitution; and one of these is a law granting university autonomy: but was the law well-framed?

Government officials, political parties, and university professors are unanimous in their belief that the universities need rapid attention: they suffer from overcrowding, graduate unemployment, poor teaching, and lack of research. Furthermore the universities do not have the power to distribute their own funds, to select their staff or students, or to organise their own teaching. Every decision has to pass through the central Ministry of Education.

Even before the Constitution was written and approved, the Ministry of Education and Science was preparing a

draft of a law for autonomy, and—despite strong criticism—it was forced through the Council of Ministers and entered parliament the day before its dissolution.

The law as it has been published is a long and in certain aspects detailed text. It deals at length with the structure of university management (Senate, Rector, etc.) and with the teaching staff; but it deals only briefly with the administrative staff and research.

Two changes introduced by the new law are financial autonomy, and the separation of academic and economic authorities. The law also allows the existence of private universities, which would interest certain religious societies.

But many points in the law have received criticism from the universities—such as the system of selection of teaching staff, which remains almost untouched. For example, an aspirant to full professorship (Catedrático) must spend three years as associate professor (Adjunto), a regulation which bars many non-academic professionals

whose expertise might benefit a university.

The law also describes—in detail—the composition of the various university institutions, making it difficult to apply to any new university, while some fundamental problems—such as the role and funding of research, the selection of students, and increases in funding or staff, are left untouched.

The parliament formed after the elections held on 1 March is almost identical to the previous one, and the centrist party will most likely be charged with the task of forming the new government. It will probably back the existing law as created by the Ministry.

In the universities it is hoped that the law may produce some positive changes, but it is regretted that a general debate and a deep rethinking of the function of the universities in Spain has not taken place. If the law is approved as it is, it may be felt by the teaching community as a lost opportunity.

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