

Social Security will provide \$250,000 over three years.

The combined expertise of the CCAE's Department of Counselling and Special Education and the HCA will provide intensive practical training aimed at equipping students for a job in a sheltered workshop, if not open employment. Forty per cent of the program will be devoted to teaching social skills: how to mix with people on the job, behave in the CCAE canteen, and make use of free time.

The benefits of this well-endowed project will extend far beyond the participants. It will develop, test and refine training methods for use throughout the country. Dr Peter O'Connor, head of the Department of Counselling and Special Education, believes they will be able to demonstrate that even severely developmentally disabled people can learn fairly complex technical skills. If he is right there is a shock in store for sheltered workshops, which usually offer only the simplest, most tedious occupations.

Dr O'Connor is hoping for a flow-on effect to raise the expectations of both sheltered workshops and activity therapy centres. By its third year the project will be training trainers from all over Australia, preparing detailed manuals and offering a consultancy service. It is an exciting prospect for the Cinderella of disability groups; for the first time they have been given the resources, the expertise and the chance to prove their capabilities.

Janet Boorer

MEDICINE

In-vitro debate changes course

THE Victorian committee of inquiry into in-vitro fertilisation has been unable in its interim report to make a recommendation on the donation of embryos and ova — and with good reason.

The issues are complex. Where the genetic materials are the parents' own, the interests of the direct participants are in harmony. On the other hand, in the case of donor-supplied genetic material there is the possibility of a conflict of interests.

Potential recipients argue that to have children is a condition of health and that they have a right to genetic matter from freely consenting donors if this is their only hope of fertility. But others, such as associations of relinquishing mothers, argue that in many cases consent is likely to be uninformed or unwise. For instance, it may

become apparent to the donor only later that, even though parental bonding does not loom as large as in the case of adoption, some aspect of the same feeling of loss may appear. The evidence from the experience of sperm donors in AID programs is that they tend not to be prone to such feelings. This argument, then, derives from the likely reactions of women donors and the men whose sperm has fertilised an egg before donation — that is, when the donation is in the form of an embryo.

What is more, although it is impossible now to be clear about psychological disadvantage to children who are the result of genetic material donation, we have evidence of the concern that adopted children have about their genetic origins. To bring children into the world with such known disadvantages and possible unknown further disadvantages, it is argued, is to act irresponsibly.

There are thus substantial conflicts between the claims of the infertile and those made on behalf of donors and children. One way of approaching the problem is to discount one or more of the claims. For instance, it can be argued that infertility should not be seen primarily as a matter of health but perhaps as the outcome of oppressive social norms that impose unreasonable expectations about having children. On the other hand, some people argue that suffering by adoptive and relinquishing parents is overstated because only the vocal minority attracts the attention of the media and is represented by organisations putting a public case.

Yet again, it is pointed out that the eventual children would be in no different position from any others, since no child, whatever the means of its conception, consents to the early circumstances of its life. What is more, we generally condone the coming into being of children who may have far greater crosses to bear than being the product of embryo donation.

These arguments are hard to evaluate and some depend on information not yet to hand. If we assume that the conflicting claims are all valid and need to be balanced in a coherent public policy, a number of fairly straightforward safeguards of the interests of children and donors are possible. One is to insist that potential donors are made aware of the possible risks associated with donating genetic material.

There is a suggestion that some AID children have been disturbed because the sperm from which they originate was paid for by the institution that collected it. It would be wise if embryo donors were not reimbursed even for so called "inconvenience costs". The general welfare of the eventual child can be safeguarded to some extent by screening people to whom

embryos are donated just as thoroughly as prospective adoptive parents.

The most difficult issue concerns the provisions guiding relationships between the donors of genetic material and the eventual children. To keep no accessible records or to keep records solely to establish the possibility of genetic diseases may lessen the likelihood of conflict between donor and donee. Yet this ignores the importance of information about genetic parentage in the formation of self-identity and the sense of absolute loss for the donors. An absolute right of access for donors, on the other hand, opens up possibilities of conflicts of interests and loyalties for all three parties. A compromise arrangement, again not without its faults, would be to give both children and donors a right of knowledge of prescribed kinds exercisable through independent agents. Even meetings could be arranged with the consent of the parents while the child is young.

Catherine Lowy

EDUCATION

Knives out as academics look inward

ONLY a decade ago, Australian universities were rapidly expanding in size and number. But since about 1976 ever more stringent budgets have become the rule. How are universities coping with the squeeze?

The most salient feature of their response is acceptance of external constraints without much apparent objection. One possible response would have been to take the case for the social benefits of universities to the public, and to mobilise staff and student pressure against the cuts. That such a course was not taken is not surprising.

Most academic research and teaching, from physics to economics to philosophy, is oriented either to other academic specialists or to interest groups in government, industry or the professions. Seldom do academics address their writing or teaching to a wider public on topics of community interest such as employment, diet and exercise, human relations, or peace and war. Those who do are often looked down upon as mere popularisers.

Most academics and many students are also rather disdainful of the untutored

masses, and are reluctant to descend into the political fray to defend universities from cutbacks. Even the reduction of study leave and proposals to weaken tenure have stimulated only a few staff to protest vigorously.

Few academics have made any attempt to build networks of support in the wider community by suitable orientation of courses and research, or even through public relations. Rather, they have depended on the goodwill of government for funding. And when the government changed its tune, the university could only sing along.

To refer to the "university" as a single entity is of course incorrect. Indeed, the funding cuts have highlighted the differing interests of groups within the university. The result of the squeeze has been the sacrifice of the weaker members of the academic community, irrespective of their academic merit. In other words, instead of opposing the cuts externally, academic power brokers have been assiduous in wielding the axe internally.

To some extent funding cuts can be absorbed by reducing capital expenditure and containing expenses such as travel money, photocopying and the like. But as the squeeze tightens, positions must be pruned. Among those most vulnerable are untenured staff such as temporary lecturers, tutors and research assistants. Because they do not have tenure, their positions may be eliminated regardless of their academic performance. One incidental but important consequence is that in many cases the proportion of women — who are concentrated in the lower academic ranks — being retained or appointed is going down.

Some positions become vacant through retirements and resignations. Many of these are not filled. But some positions are filled, and even some new ones created. The competition for these positions is now incredibly intense. Indeed, a sizable fraction of tenured academics would be very lucky to obtain their own positions should they be openly advertised. There are some tutors for example, struggling one year at a time to keep their positions, whose teaching load and research productivity shames tenured academics on twice the salary. Universities have never been meritocracies, but the squeeze has made the resemblance even more remote.

Inside the decision-making bodies of the universities, the question is: which posts should be cut and which ones filled? The answer is more often determined by political power than academic merit. Departments with powerful professors or with friends in high places are much more likely to maintain their positions in the



Cutting edge of the academic razor: hopeful graduate students scan a university appointments noticeboard for news of tutorships.

ruthless battle for staff, and for promotions, courses, equipment and other perquisites. Things have always been this way, but the game is less forgiving these days. The knives are out, and demarcation disputes between departments more shrill. Faculty meetings are not nearly as boring as they once were.

WHILE among individuals the untenured staff are most vulnerable, on a larger scale the smaller departments and independent programs are most likely to be trimmed by staff cuts, amalgamations or cancellation of courses. For example, at the Australian National University staff cuts are planned in 1983 for both women's

Municipal Association of Victoria RESEARCH OFFICER (Youth Services)

The MAV has received a research grant from the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation to undertake a study of the availability, effectiveness, financing and future development of youth services at local government level.

A person with experience in youth services and Victorian local government policy-making and administration is required for the project.

The appointment will be for one year on a full-time basis working from the MAV offices. Secondment would be given favourable consideration. Remuneration will be commensurate with the duties undertaken.

Applications will close on Feb. 2nd, 1983.

A specification of duties should be obtained from

The Secretary,
Municipal Association of Victoria,
15 Queens Rd., Melbourne, Vic. 3004
Telephone: (03) 26 4421

studies and the human sciences program. Both are small, popular with students, and have low to average total costs per student. But unlike larger traditional departments, these programs have no professor in charge or other powerful figure to press their case. The areas most severely affected are ones such as women's studies and environmental studies, which are innovative, socially relevant and interdisciplinary, and thus threaten professional territories and offend traditionally minded staff.

All these processes are leading to a fossilisation of tertiary research and teaching. As government funding is cut, the academic razor gangs chop out or keep out the most challenging and dynamic individuals and programs. As the relevance of tertiary education declines, student numbers drop and so government funding is cut to continue the vicious circle.

Those who make the decisions about funding priorities are the deans, professors, heads of departments and higher administrators. All of them have tenure and comfortable salaries, which apparently are prerequisites for deciding the fate of those in lesser positions. Since most of them rose to their present positions by doing narrow disciplinary research, staying strictly within the university hierarchy, maintaining social links with those of similar inclination, and generally not rocking the boat, it is not surprising that they are ready to make the necessary but unpleasant decisions — namely chopping someone else's job or course. It is also revealing that in many cases while the number of academic posts has steadily dwindled, the number of administrative positions has remained stable or even increased.

Indulging in a bit of instructive day-dreaming, one might imagine a radical solution to the academic squeeze: create many more positions by flattening all salaries, perhaps to the average wage. (A wage freeze on all higher salaries would accomplish this gradually.) This would create numerous opportunities for the many talented and idealistic people who would be quite happy to do research and teach on a moderate salary, without concern for the extra prestige and power of a professorship and \$50,000 a year. There would also be more scope for innovative teaching and attention to pressing community issues. Universities could take a lead — and gain considerable public support by doing so — by promoting flattening of wages and sharing out of the workload as a contribution to the unemployment problem generally. But among academics, especially those presently in positions of power and prestige, egalitarianism is extremely unpopular, just as it is in other elite professions and indeed among the intelligentsia in communist countries.

Seeing into the future is difficult. On the one hand, the squeeze is having the effect of further entrenching the existing academic power structure. Those ejected from academia most often simply accept their fates without open protest. On the other hand, frustrated aspirants to the academic life may channel their discontent into social action through community groups or political parties. In either case, the image of the universities in Australian society is not good, and resentment of the academic razor gangs is helping to make that image worse.

Brian Martin

PUBLIC SERVICE

A bad time to question authority

AUTHORITARIAN behaviour in some branches of the New South Wales public service has recently prompted complaints from employees about the atmosphere created and the effect on staff morale and attitudes.

Three types of behaviour have been drawing complaints: non-consultation about matters that directly concern staff; secret attempts to check on and record staff performance and attitudes; various overt forms of control designed to deter critics. In all cases the staff exercising control and the people who comply seem to assume that deference to the organisation should be rewarded, whereas critical suggestions for alternative policies should be ignored or punished.

Of course, authoritarianism in the public service may have none of the frightening and sensational features of the Polish armed forces rounding up their brothers, or of prison officers bashing their charges. Yet when senior administrators assert themselves in an inflexible, arbitrary or consistently secretive way, an unpleasant atmosphere is created and contributes to low staff morale. When the subordinates comply with this assertiveness, as in Milgram's experiments to test obedience to authority, authoritarianism may become a way of life, almost taken for granted. At that point it begins to assume Orwellian 1984 proportions.

In the Department of Youth and Community Services, staff have complained about being sent at a moment's notice and without consultation to other offices. By mid-1982 these practices had

contributed to a serious crisis of confidence among employees and drawn bad publicity for the department. One government response was to appoint both an internal management review team and a firm of expensive management consultants, McKinsey and Associates.

The treatment of an organisation's chronic and acute difficulties by appointing management consultants is a prescription used frequently in recent years. But staff who have been fed on the rhetoric of consultation and participation feel cynical about having their complaints about the arbitrary use of authority met with "solutions" imposed from above or outside.

Evidence of the second form of authoritarianism comes from the NSW Electricity Commission and from other government departments in their relationships with the Public Service Board. In the case of the Electricity Commission, a Sydney Morning Herald report revealed widespread discontent over the practice of senior staff filling in forms to record their interpretations of the timekeeping, work performance and attitudes of colleagues.

In the case of the Public Service Board, the controversial issues have occurred in the context of continuing struggles between members of the board and departmental heads striving for autonomy. During one of these struggles a few months ago, an officer of the Public Service Board was sent to interview a member of the Department of Agriculture who was regarded as critical of the board. The investigating officer wrote in his report that he tried to remember everything that was said "as close to verbatim as possible", and he reported to his superior officer on the "critical", "unco-operative" and "intransigent" attitude of the person concerned. The investigating officer's superior noted that further inquiries should be made to see whether the "intransigent person" should have charges made against him.

Whatever the circumstances surrounding such events, or even the fact that some might regard these practices as sensible (albeit clumsy) administration, the employees who reported the incidents felt dismayed and disheartened by them. They thought that such behaviour was childish but sinister. They had not expected such practices and felt that they represented the very things that Professor Wilenski in his proposals from reform in the NSW Public Service has called "relics of a bygone age".

Overt attempts to control or punish critics often occur when groups have dependent relationships with government because they depend on financial sponsorship. For example, the secretary of a NSW