

negie-Mellon University from 1966 to 1972, he conducted early experiments on multiprocessor architecture. Most recently he has been associated with Encore, a start-up computer firm developing parallel processing systems.

In a staff memo describing his rationale for consolidating computer-related activities, Bloch noted that "NSF has considerable activities in computer science, information science, computer engineering, supercomputers, and networking. Our investment in these new and important areas is growing rapidly. Many of the existing projects, programs, and initiatives are interrelated and support a common community of scientists and engineers. In order to assure a broad and thorough understanding of our opportunities and responsibilities, a closer linkage between these organizationally separate groups is important."

The new directorate will be NSF's eighth. ■ **JOHN WALSH**

British Telescope Dogged by British Weather

The Royal Greenwich Observatory, founded by King Charles II in 1675 on a hill overlooking the River Thames at the edge of London but transferred to the Sussex countryside shortly after World War II, will shortly be on the move again.

Britain's Science and Engineering Research Council, which took over responsibility for running the RGO in 1965, decided last week that the RGO should leave its current location at Herstmonceux Castle. It will either merge with the Royal Observatory Edinburgh in Scotland (the council's first choice), or be moved to new facilities linked to either Cambridge or Manchester universities.

The observatory was shifted to Herstmonceux from its original site in 1949 because of the promise of better viewing conditions than those in the nation's capital. "Unfortunately, these did not turn out to be of the standard required for first-class astronomy," the council now says, admitting that there had been no space from the English weather.

With the decision to move the observatory's 2.5-meter Isaac Newton Telescope to La Palma in the Canary Islands off Spain, and to construct the new 4.2-meter William Herschel Telescope on the same site, an intense discussion has been taking place in recent months over the future of what is now largely an administrative headquarters in Sussex, as well as that of the RGO's

various historical collections of rare books and astronomical records.

The council said in a statement last week that it considered the potential benefits to both RGO and ROE of a combination on the Edinburgh site were "significant in creating a more flexible operation, with great efficiency and a larger scientific core underpinning its support activity." Alternatively, it added, "the benefits to RGO of a campus association are considerable."

Replying to those who had claimed that the move would cost \$7 million at a time when the SERC was already complaining of a severe shortage of funds, the council says that it expects any of the proposed moves to be self-financing, primarily through the sale of the RGO's present buildings and land.

Another criticism had been that a move at this stage would disrupt plans for the La Palma Observatory, in particular for the initial use of the William Herschel Telescope as it comes into operation over the next few years.

Because of this danger, the council says it does not intend that the RGO will actually move until "about 1990". SERC chairman Bill Mitchell says he expects to be able to recommend a final choice on the RGO's new resting place to the council in June, after carrying out a detailed assessment of the practical problems presented by each of the three proposed solutions. ■

DAVID DICKSON

New French Government Scraps Research Ministry

Paris

The new French Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, has decided to abolish the Ministry of Research and Technology—the spearhead of the previous government's drive to modernize French society—and to shift political responsibility for science back into the hands of the Ministry of National Education.

At the same time, the new government seems to have distanced itself from those who had called during the election campaign for a radical restructuring either of the organization of the French research community or of the university sector.

Overall responsibility for both will rest with the new minister for national education, René Monory, a former senator who belongs to one of the smaller, centrist parties making up the conservative coalition that won the parliamentary elections on 16 March by an unexpectedly small majority.

Serving under Monory as a "ministre

délégué" (deputy minister) with special responsibility for research and higher education will be Alain Devaquet, an active member of Chirac's party, the Rassemblement pour le République (RPR) and, since 1979, the scientific adviser to the new prime minister.

Devaquet has considerable experience of the scientific community. A physicist by training, he worked on the staff of the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) between 1966 and 1970. He subsequently spent 3 years carrying out research at Cornell University and the University of Western Ontario in Canada, and currently holds a chair at the University of Paris-VI as well as a teaching post at the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique.

So far, the new government has made no public statements about the policy it proposes to pursue on science. During the campaign, however, Monory was the member of a group that put forward a set of proposals for the reform of French education, including the creation of "foundations" for financing both research and "free" (that is, independent of the state) universities.

According to sources in Paris, one of its first moves is likely to be the creation of such a foundation for supported research in the social sciences.

Devaquet had frequently argued that it was necessary to reunite science and education into a single ministry, as it had been under the previous administration of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

He is expected to vigorously pursue the promise made by both conservative parties during the election campaign to increase the freedom of universities from state controls, as well as to decrease the amount of central direction over the content of research, for example, by handing over responsibility for some research laboratories from the CNRS to the universities with which they are already associated. However, he is not expected to go as far as suppressing the CNRS altogether, a suggestion raised last fall by Michèle Alliot-Marie, at the time the RPR's chief spokesperson on higher education and research, who has been appointed secrétaire d'état with responsibility for schools in the new government. ■ **DAVID DICKSON**

Comings and Goings

Robert Petersdorf, dean of the University of California School of Medicine at San Diego, has been named president of the Association of American Medical Schools. He succeeds **John A. D. Cooper**, who has been AAMC president since 1969.