Gallo Gets Itchy Feet, Looks to Academe

After 22 years at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), 50-year-old Robert Gallo is seriously considering moving on. But, as befits the flamboyant codiscoverer of the AIDS virus, who occasionally refers to himself in the third person, Gallo will leave his post at the National Cancer Institute only if a brand new, "medically historical" institute is created.

Rumors of Gallo's departure from NIH have been bouncing around the biomedical research community for months. "It's not everybody's business yet," says Gallo. "A lot of cards are being held close to a few chests."

For a man who will not discuss his possible plans, Gallo can become extremely specific about his "dream institute," down to such details as the amount of floor space required. According to Gallo, the new institute would be built around research on the AIDS virus, with a general theme of human virology. AIDS vaccine development would be a major thrust. Also, Gallo says, the institute would be attached to a major university, with dual appointments for its senior scientists, and "great access" to primates, AIDS patients, and eager post-docs. Yale, Duke, and Johns Hopkins have all been mentioned as possible hosts, though at this point Johns Hopkins looks like the front-runner.

Gallo has been quietly talking with a handful of leading AIDS researchers for months. Members of his own laboratory confirm that Gallo is "really serious [about leaving NIH] this time." In addition, Gallo has discussed the project with such research luminaries as Samuel Broder of National Cancer Institute and Luc Montagnier, the French researcher at the Pasteur Institute who battled with Gallo over credit for the discovery of the AIDS virus.

Some reasons for the possible departure are simple, like funding and space limitations at NIH. Gallo would like to bring together four or five major research groups, and that would be difficult at NIH, where salaries for even top staff cannot exceed $100,000 a year and laboratory bench space is scarce. There are other, more personal reasons. Gallo says that after 22 years at NIH he is curious about life in an academic setting.

James Wyngaarden, director of NIH, says that losing Gallo and top-flight researchers like him is a serious problem. "It's not the time to have any lost momentum."

How any new institute would be funded is still something of a mystery. Estimated costs of the venture run between $100 million and $200 million. Gallo confirms that two brothers, David and Isaac Blech, are playing a major role in negotiations at Johns Hopkins. The Blechs are New York venture capitalists, and though publicity shy, the two *wunderkinder* have raised the cash to start such notable biotechnology firms as Genetic Systems (sold to Bristol-Myers for a reported $300 million), Cambridge Bioscience, DNA Plant Technology, Cellgene, and Nova Pharmaceuticals.

How investors would recoup the money raised by people like the Blechs is not yet worked out. Creating a spin-off company has been mentioned. Gallo insists that he would never become involved in anything so crass as a company, but he admits "you don't come up with big money unless you cover people's risks." Says Gary Buck, president of Cambridge Bioscience: "The Blechs are very astute. They have a nose for opportunity, but they are totally profit-oriented. That is what they do. They make money." How Gallo's professed dislike of profiteering would fit into the investors' plans is yet to be seen. ■ **WILLIAM BOOTH**

Rubbia in Line to Head CERN

Italian physicist Carlo Rubbia is expected to be appointed the next director-general of the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland. He will take over from the current director-general Herwig Schopper of West Germany, whose term of office expires at the end of next year.

A formal decision on Schopper's successor will be made at the next meeting of the CERN Council, due to take place in Geneva on 17 and 18 December. CERN officials point out that, officially, the list of nominations from the 14 member states has not yet been closed; so far, however, Rubbia's name is the only one to have been put forward.

Furthermore, in deciding to nominate Rubbia as its candidate, the Italian government has bypassed his only serious rival, physicist Antonino Zichichi, currently director of the Lepton Asymmetry Analyser (LAA) project at CERN and director of the Center for Scientific Culture "Ettore Majorana" in Erice, Sicily. Zichichi is widely credited with having played a key role in securing major increases in the Italian government's support for high energy physics in recent years.

Joe Wrinn, Harvard University

Carlo Rubbia. *The only candidate nominated so far for CERN.*

Rubbia shared, with the physicist Simon van der Meer, CERN's first Nobel Prize (in 1984) for the experimental demonstration of the existence of the field particles W and Z which communicate the weak interaction. He has also been closely involved in developing plans for the CERN Linear Collider (CLIC). This is widely seen as the leading candidate for the laboratory's next major construction project if the United States goes ahead with construction of the Superconducting Super Collider.

Another factor that is said to have helped his nomination is that although the Italian government was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the creation of CERN in the early 1950s—and has remained so ever since—the laboratory has yet to see an Italian director-general appointed.

Rubbia will be taking over the leadership of CERN at a difficult time. Besides formally choosing Schopper's successor, next month's meeting will also discuss the final report of a review committee chaired by French physicist Anatole Abragam. A first draft of the report, published last summer, recommended the elimination of between 300 and 500 jobs from CERN's current payroll of 3500 scientific and technical personnel over the next 2 years.

Rubbia may also have to face the consequences of the possible withdrawal of Britain from CERN. The British government has warned that it may give notice to the December meeting of its intention to withdraw at the beginning of 1989 if significant cuts are not made in the running costs of the laboratory. ■ **DAVID DICKSON**