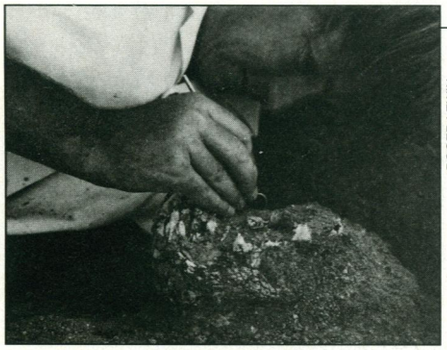
edited by RICHARD STONE



ROGER LEWIN

New political landscape. Richard Leakey is co-organizing a political party in Kenya.

Leakey to Become a Political Scientist

Anthropologist Richard Leakey, who lives in Nairobi, Kenya, is teaming up with a local politician to form a new political party as an answer to what he calls "corruption and police brutality."

Leakey is no neophyte to politics in Kenya: In March 1994 he resigned from the directorship of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), a government agency that oversees Kenya's national parks and game reserves, after months of battles with Kenyan politicians over allegations of misconduct in the KWS (*Science*, 1 April 1994, p. 23).

But if you can't beat the politicians, join 'em. According to the *Kenya News*, Leakey and Paul Muite, a member of Kenya's parliament, plan to form a party to compete with the ruling Kanu Party of Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi. Leakey says he's surprised by all the coverage his party is receiving in Kenya. "People act as if it was a nuclear bomb, but it was only an afternoon reading of a political statement," he told *Science*.

Leakey and Muite will unveil their plans next week. For now, all Leakey would say is that Kenya "doesn't have a government that is working particularly well."

WHO, Colombia Ink Malaria Vaccine Deal

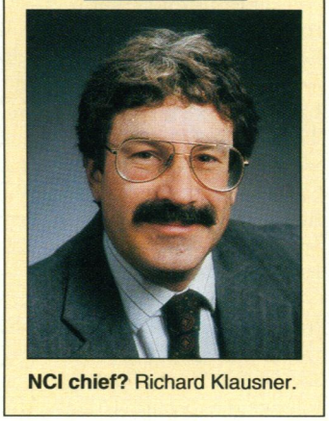
Last week, Colombian physician and biochemist Manuel Patarroyo, inventor of a controversial malaria vaccine, received a hero's welcome at the World Health Organization's (WHO's) annual assembly in Geneva. The occasion: Patarroyo signed an agreement with Director-General Hiroshi Nakajima on 4 May granting WHO the rights to manufacture, distribute, and sell his vaccine. But when the applause died down, some WHO delegates from the 190 member countries were wondering what all the hoopla was about.

For one thing, Patarroyo's SPf66 vaccine has a mixed track record in clinical trials so far (*Science*, 20 January, p. 320). And discussions between Patarroyo and WHO over a licensing agreement have dragged on for 2 years, mired in several key issues. Still to be settled are: Who will determine if the vaccine is ready for large-scale production, who gets to make it, and when to distribute it. "The present agreement only covers the legal basis for the gift" of the vaccine to WHO, says WHO lawyer Tom Topping. Nevertheless, Topping says he's "optimistic" the parties will forge a final agreement within 6 months.

The current agreement comes with strings attached. If by November WHO has failed to choose a nonprofit manufacturer suitable to both sides, the licensing rights revert to the Colombians. Few would be surprised if the Colombians win the contract: The government is creating a "joint-venture nonprofit foundation," as Patarroyo explained to reporters after the signing. It could supply bulk vaccine at cost to WHO, thanks to a $20 million facility in Bogotá that should be operating by 1998.

Klausner Tapped to Head NCI?

Staffers at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) are drumming their fingers on the table, waiting to hear who President Clinton will choose as the new director of the $2.1 billion institute—a decision that Harold Varmus, director of the National Institutes of Health, hopes to have in hand by June. The name almost everyone expects to hear is Richard Klausner, cell biology lab chief at the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development.



NCI chief? Richard Klausner.

Anticipatory tremors rippled through a meeting last week in San Diego of the American Federation for Clinical Research and the American Society of Clinical Investigation (ASCI). According to meetinggoers, Klausner, then ASCI president, is the leading candidate for the NCI director's job, which will oversee an anticipated reorganization of the institute later this year. Some observers in Washington, D.C., report that the White House has already contacted Klausner and that the paperwork for the announcement is being processed. Klausner declined to comment.

Don't bet your lab space on Klausner just yet: NCI staffers warn that when presidential decisions are involved, any prediction is dicey.

Will Legal Reform Mean More Research on Contraceptives?

Drug companies are hoping for a renaissance soon in the stagnant area of contraceptives research. But first, they claim, Congress must end the dark ages of liability. The companies are lobbying Congress to pass legislation that would shield them from punitive damages in lawsuits over products approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

According to a recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, the number of major U.S. companies doing R&D on contraceptives has dropped from eight to two since 1970 (*Science*, 2 December 1994, p. 1489). The biggest problem may be lawsuits, says Polly Harrison, an IOM medical anthropologist, who cites a boom in vaccine research after a 1986 law shielding vaccinemakers from many liabilities. As part of a House legal reform bill, companies could still be liable for damages for economic loss or pain and suffering. But the courts could not punish drugmakers by imposing punitive damages if they had followed FDA rules.

Drug companies say it's time that juries, which assess punitive damages, stop second-guessing FDA science. Like vaccines, contraceptives are prone to lawsuits over known side effects or risks, says William Ruane, assistant general counsel for American Home Products Corp., which makes the contraceptive Norplant. Ruane says 130 lawsuits have been filed in the past year over Norplant side effects such as scarring and dizziness. "These cases are judged on emotional issues," says Pamela Stratton, who heads clinical contraceptive research at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, "and that has a chilling effect on science."

But the group Public Citizen and others argue that current legal reform efforts are misguided because FDA rules don't always ensure a product's safety. They cite reported health problems from such FDA-approved products as silicone breast implants (immune disorders) and intrauterine devices (infections). Such opposition helped sink a reform bill last year.

Reform language to the liking of drug companies passed the House last March, and the Senate was still debating its bill as *Science* went to press. A House-Senate conference to reconcile the two bills is expected to take place later this month.