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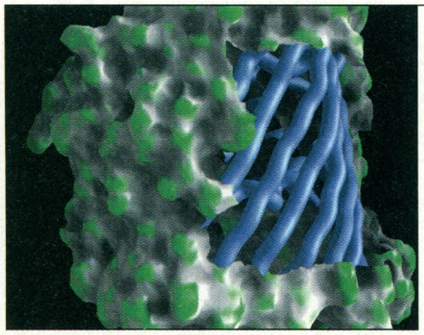

M. POTTER AND J. A. MCCAMMON/UCSD/SDSC

Prickly problem. Rift threatens San Diego supercomputing center, where this image of an *E. coli* membrane protein was made.

Dispute Jars San Diego Computing Center

The industry-academic partnership behind the San Diego Supercomputing Center (SDSC), one of four major pillars funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) that hold up the nation's I-way, has come unraveled in a way that could cripple its chances of winning a pending competition for NSF support.

For the past 10 years, General Atomics (GA) has run SDSC, which is on the campus of the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). When the NSF announced in December that it wanted to replace the supercomputing network with a more efficient program (*Science*, 5 January, p. 35), GA and UCSD decided to file a proposal jointly. That plan crashed on 13 March when GA Vice Chair Linden Blue wrote UCSD that the company had reached the "most disappointing conclusion" that the school's position "has become inconsistent with ... continuity of a genuine partnership of equals in the interest of the strongest possible proposal." GA has decided to file its own proposal.

The rift apparently centers around intellectual property rights derived from the center's activities and UCSD's first choice to run the proposed new center: Sid Karin, SDSC's founding director and a former vice president at GA. Karin left GA last month, but he says he is "enthused about the new program." Karin told *Science* he left GA for "personal reasons," but SDSC sources say he was concerned about GA's desire to aggressively develop the commercial potential of the center. NSF's Dick Kaplan notes that the hugely successful Netscape software is based on work done at NSF's Illinois supercomputer center and says "this does not escape the attention of GA."

Although preproposals for the new NSF competition must be in by 15 April, final bids aren't due until 1 September. Both Blue and Marvin Goldberger, dean of UCSD's division of natural sciences, say that may be enough time to resolve their dispute.

Board Seeks Power to Oust NAE President

The next step in the ongoing leadership crisis gripping the National Academy of Engineering may be an attempt by the NAE board to gain the right to remove elected officials. That proposal, expected to be put before members this spring, would clear the way for the board to fire NAE President Harold Liebowitz.

Fearful of legal action by Liebowitz, the academy's board is moving cautiously in its effort to oust him, NAE sources say. Liebowitz was elected last year as a reform candidate, but he has drawn private complaints from NAE members and public criticism from the National Academy of Sciences, which in February stripped him of his responsibilities as vice chair of the National Research Council. Liebowitz maintains that the organization's officers are trying to thwart his reforms (*Science*, 1 March, p. 1222).

Meanwhile, one of Liebowitz's closest allies has asked him to step down. Bill Harris, a Texas A&M University engineering professor, urged Liebowitz in a 28 February letter to resign "at the earliest possible date for the good of the engineering profession." Harris, Liebowitz's senior adviser until December, harshly criticizes his actions and concludes that the current crisis is due to "your ineptitude." Liebowitz said last month he refuses to resign despite the mounting pressure; earlier this week he didn't return calls seeking comment.

DARPA Considers a Biology Program

Long known for its innovative support of electronics and communications technologies, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)—the civilian R&D outfit in the Department of Defense (DOD)—is thinking of getting into biology as well. Spurred by the Tokyo subway gas attack last March and a fear that terrorist nations might wield chemical weapons against U.S. troops, DARPA Director Larry Lynn says the agency wants to develop an entirely new portfolio—in biology.

In exploring this new territory, DARPA is getting advice from, among others, Joshua Lederberg, the Nobel Prize–winning geneticist. Lederberg, who says he's keeping "a low profile" as a DARPA adviser, believes that "we badly need some improved capability in detectors" of chemical and biological devices. In addition, Lederberg sees a need for better means of diagnosing injuries caused by such weapons. Training in this area for emergency workers would be helpful, he adds, as using the right treatment quickly can make a great difference.

DARPA (which just added Defense back to its name as directed by the DOD authorization bill signed in February) hasn't made any decisions yet, Lynn says. But the agency is considering hiring staff to run a biological research program and may have a more concrete plan within 6 months. The Army already conducts biological defense research, but Lynn's assistant, Jan Walker, says the program would look to fund complementary, "higher risk" technologies.

Russian Station Delay Angers U.S.

Budget snags in Russia are threatening to delay the international space station program and undermine political support for the effort, according to a spate of letters flying between Russia, members of Congress, and U.S. Vice President Al Gore.

The debate centers on the Russian service module, which will form a key part of the station when launched in 1998. The Russian Space Agency has had trouble getting its government to fork out funds to pay contractors building the module. On 10 March, Vice President Gore warned Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin in a strongly worded letter that Russia's failure to fully fund its portion of the station "could lead our opponents in Congress to kill our partnership." Gore asked Chernomyrdin to ensure "adequate and steady funding" to avoid launch slips and suggested the United States might begin preparing monthly status reports on Russia's progress.

Gore's warning follows an 8 March letter to Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets from Representatives Jerry Lewis (R–CA) and James Sensenbrenner (R–WI), who must defend 1997 station spending this spring as chairs of panels that oversee the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. They asserted that "a slip in the schedule of the service module seriously threatens continued congressional support for Russian participation" in the program.

Russia anticipated the U.S. complaints: They came just as a 4 March letter from Soskovets was making its way to House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R–GA) and Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R–KS) "to reaffirm the Russian government's commitment to provide economic and financial support" for the station. Russian officials in Moscow were meeting last week to find money to pay the contractors and allay U.S. concerns.