little critters," he told *Science*. Structural and carbon analyses of those pieces are expected to provide a better indication of whether the formations in the rock are indeed a record of past life or are of geochemical origin.

Other teams will be deploying different techniques to get at the same answers. At the University of Portsmouth in Britain, researchers will make use of an atomic force microscope that can examine tiny bacteria in great detail. And scientists at the Mitsubishi-Kasei Institute of Life Sciences in Tokyo will use a microfluorescence technique able to highlight any organic material. "What we really need are additional kinds of data," says McKay, such as evidence of cell walls. "For a very small amount of money we will be able to analyze these meteorites" in much greater detail, he adds.

These teams won't be the only ones with a piece of the rock. NASA intends to give out $1 million and will solicit proposals in November. The National Science Foundation, which sponsored the team that found the meteorites in Antarctica in 1984, may kick in another $1 million, according to Administration officials. If all goes as planned, the winners could receive their money early next year. NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin has promised that many scientists will have an opportunity to take part in the studies, and other NASA officials say that they hope micropaleontologists, microbiologists, and researchers from other disciplines will apply for funding.

But cutting-edge equipment, plenty of money, and an interdisciplinary team of researchers may not be enough to settle the debate over whether life once existed on Mars. "That's a lot to ask from something the size of a potato," says Michael Meyer, NASA's exobiology program manager, about the 1.9-kilogram chunk of rock. "I don't think you can have definitive proof because of the sample size," he adds.

NASA isn't putting all its eggs in one meteoric basket. If the data from ALH84001 prove inconclusive, says McKay, then "we'll just have to wait until we get [more] Mars rocks back here." Huntress told the panel that evidence of possible life changes the complexion of the planned Martian research program: "Now we don't just want any sample; we want a sample with the right stuff."

NASA plans a sample-return mission to Mars as early as 2003, but the expense associated with such exploration prompted members of the House panel to urge stronger international cooperation. "This is an opportunity to weld a coalition that goes beyond a bilateral agreement with Russia," says Representative Robert Walker (R–PA), retiring House Science Committee chair. The U.S. spacecraft are intended to include some foreign experiments, but Huntress says "we need to change that."

The degree of international participation will depend on what those partners can afford, however. Financial constraints are likely to limit the amount of Russian participation in a joint venture planned for 2001, say U.S. officials. Japan will launch a Mars probe in 1998, while the European Space Agency has put on hold any plans to send exploratory spacecraft.

Several lawmakers at the hearing warned NASA not to misread their enthusiasm about the findings as a green light for a bigger budget. "You're really dealing with circumstantial evidence," Representative Ralph Hall (D–TX) told the NASA team. "And I've had letters ... from some who have said not to spend a dollar on this as long as we have a baby's bottle empty in this country." The funding outlook could change, however, if the new studies provide incontestable evidence that life existed on the Red Planet.

–Andrew Lawler

U.K. SCIENCE POLICY

Labour Promises Key Role for Science

LONDON—Statements from Britain's Labour Party are being taken seriously these days: With a lead of 15% in the opinion polls and a general election due before next summer, today's pronouncements could be tomorrow's policies. Britain's scientific community is therefore paying close attention to a document Labour published last week laying out its science policy. It includes promises to bolster flagging morale among researchers and elevate science in government decision-making. According to Adam Ingram, Labour's science spokesperson, "Under Labour there will be a change of ethos and culture in the way that government approaches science policy."

Changing ethos. Labour's Adam Ingram.

The statement comes at a time when the Conservative government's popularity among researchers has taken a dive. In 1992 it won wide praise from the research community with the launch of a science and technology white paper, a new Office of Science and Technology (OST), and a Cabinet minister for science for the first time in more than 30 years. But changes since then have not been so welcome: Last year the OST was shifted into the Department of Trade and Industry, blunting its ability to coordinate science policy across government departments; there have been deep cuts in university funding; a series of reviews has marked a number of government research establishments for privatization (*Science*, 31 May, p. 1254); and the new advisory Council for Science and Technology established by the white paper was expected to make its advice public, but none has yet been revealed.

The Labour Party statement promises to reverse some of these actions, starting with the lab reviews. The laboratories are a "major national resource and a source of crucial research expertise," says Ingram, and the reviews would be halted. The statement also promises to strengthen the post of chief scientific adviser, currently held by Sir Robert May, but it makes no commitment to restore the OST to its former position in the Cabinet Office. "Another process of rapid change would not necessarily be in the best interests of the scientific community," the document says. Many researchers have expressed concern about the way science policy is developed, and "we want to examine the problems," says Ingram.

Labour's plans have drawn a sharp response from the government. Science Minister Ian Taylor told *Science* that the policies are disappointingly devoid of substance and that the plans to halt the lab reviews are "fundamentally irresponsible." About 20% of government spending on science goes through these laboratories, and it is essential to match facilities to needs as requirements change, he says. He also argues that the advisory council's advice should remain mostly confidential. "Publication would often be a mistake and ensure we wouldn't get the best advice," he says.

Before it issued its science policy statement, the Labour Party established a corporate tax review to see if it will be able to encourage companies to invest more in research and development and to promote high-technology industries. Apart from this, there is no indication in the statement of how a Labour government would pay for new initiatives—or how much it would spend on science. "We're not making funding commitments in any area before the general election. Promises would be the wrong approach," says Ingram. With the emphasis on a changing ethos, Ingram says he "wants to see science at the heart of an incoming Labour government." Physicist John Mulvey, spokesperson for the lobby group Save British Science, says "There's much to welcome in the spirit, general ideas, and intentions." But, he adds, "in government, actions would be required by Labour to match the rhetoric."

–Nigel Williams