

much more radical changes, such as ending the “researcher for life” status of publicly funded scientists and requiring them to undergo periodic reviews (*Science*, 18 June, p. 1898). While praising measures aimed at young scientists, Chambon says he fears that taken as a whole the reforms “will not change much in France.”

Cohen and Le Déaut conclude that although French research has “remarkable” po-

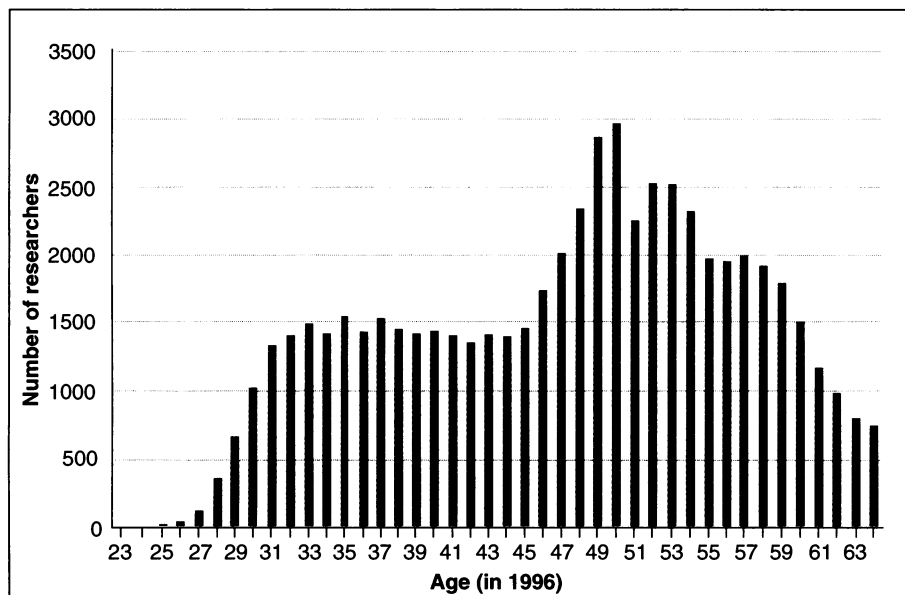
tance when Allègre first proposed it last year, but the deputies’ many consultations with researchers seem to have softened opposition and allayed suspicions that Allègre planned to weaken the CNRS in favor of the universities. And Allègre’s critics note that the new proposals stress voluntary inducements rather than top-down fiat. “Everyone will have double nationality in the public research agencies and the universi-

thing the new hires would command lower salaries than the senior scientists they are to replace. “It’s about time,” says Bernas of the recruitment push, although he criticizes the report for not giving specific numbers of researchers to be recruited. And Chambon takes issue with the idea of hiring researchers before they have done postdocs. “This is nonsense,” he says. “You cannot judge people right after their thesis.” Chambon’s own proposal—to create a corps of temporary postdocs, currently almost nonexistent in France—was rejected by the deputies.

Another proposal to boost young university researchers did meet with unanimous acclaim, however. Cohen and Le Déaut want to create a flexible system of “time credits” that would allow assistant professors in their first 3 years on the job to cast off one-third of their heavy teaching loads, which amount to 192 hours of classroom time per year. Doctoral students would then take on these teaching duties. As might be imagined, this scheme, which would cost about \$20 million per year, is being greeted enthusiastically by young university teachers. “To recognize the need to lighten the load of young researchers is an essential advance,” says physicist Isabelle Kraus, an assistant professor at the Louis Pasteur University in Strasbourg, who says this would also provide doctoral students with valuable teaching experience.

The deputies seem confident that Jospin will realize the urgency of the situation and take swift action on their recommendations. “We are at a crossroads,” said Cohen, a point seconded by Le Déaut: “If we don’t do something now ... we will have our backs against the wall in the years ahead.”

—MICHAEL BALTER



France's age pyramid. The graying of university and public agency researchers means that nearly half will retire by 2010.

tential, it faces serious problems in three areas. First, echoing Allègre, the deputies say that researchers rarely move between universities, industry, and public research agencies such as the basic science agency CNRS. Second, young scientists have great difficulty finding research jobs and achieving scientific independence. Third—a problem critics say Allègre did not fully address, and one most troubling in the deputies’ view—is what they call the “age pyramid,” the alarmingly high percentage of older researchers among France’s scientific corps (see graph).

To address the first problem, Cohen and Le Déaut wholeheartedly adopt one of Allègre’s main—and controversial—aims: a major rapprochement between the public agencies and the universities. “We must try to demolish the watertight partition” between the two sectors, Le Déaut told a press conference right after the meeting with Jospin. To induce researchers to cross the barrier, the deputies propose such measures as linking promotion and salary increases to mobility. Thus, a CNRS scientist who takes on a serious teaching load, collaborates with industry, or explores new research themes would move up the ladder faster.

This idea sparked considerable resis-

ties,” says Audier. “This is better than enforcing reforms by decree.”

In addition to urging closer ties between the CNRS and the universities, the report documents that both sectors face a graying workforce. Almost half of France’s university and public agency scientists will retire in the next 10 years, and in some fields, such as physics, 30% will retire by 2005. That leaves a dangerous gap both in numbers of scientists as well as in their level of experience. “We must avoid this catastrophe,” Cohen told the press conference. Allègre’s critics had long complained that he was neglecting this problem: The presidents of the CNRS’s 40 scientific committees recently published an editorial on their Web site declaring that the current 3% recruitment rate, mandated by the ministry for the agency, would “simply mean the death of the CNRS.”

To forestall this scenario, the deputies propose a number of measures, including a law mandating the recruitment of a minimum number of researchers each year to replace those who retire; they also suggest that newly minted Ph.D.s be hired even before their postdoctoral training. Unlike some of the other recommendations, such a recruitment drive would not require extra funds; indeed, if any-

PUBLISHING

Kassirer Forced Out at *New England Journal*

In the second big shake-up in scientific publishing this year, the editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) has been asked to step down following a management dispute with the owner, the Massachusetts Medical Society. Editor Jerome Kassirer, 66, will go on sabbatical leave beginning 1 September, and his editorship will end with the expiration of his contract on 31 March. Kassirer confirmed the news in a phone interview but declined to comment other than to say that he felt “terrible” about what is happening.

The Boston Globe learned about the shake-up last week and reported that Kassirer had been “fired.” But the medical society quickly issued a joint statement with Kassirer suggesting that the parting took place by mutual agreement because there

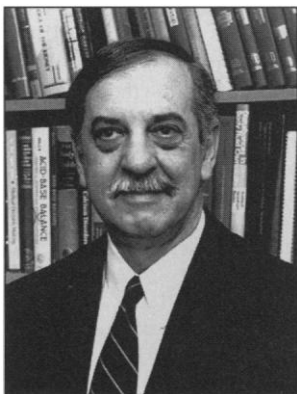
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were "honest differences of opinion between Dr. Kassirer and the medical society over administrative and publishing issues." The two sides were "unable to find common ground," the society said, and for that reason, "the best course of action" was to search for a new editor. The society will name an interim editor soon, possibly Executive Editor Marcia Angell.

To some, Kassirer's dismissal looked like a reprise of the decision by the American Medical Association (AMA) 7 months earlier to fire George Lundberg, editor of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (*Science*, 22 January, p. 467). Kassirer had less tenure than Lundberg—only 8 years compared to 17—but, like Lundberg, he clashed with the physician-executives who run the parent organization and lost. But Frank Fortin, spokesperson for the Massachusetts Medical Society, argues that the two cases are very different, noting that *NEJM's* owners never challenged Kassirer's editorial decisions: "This is not about the editorial independence or integrity" of the *NEJM*, he says. The disagreements had to do with business matters, Fortin explained, but he declined to discuss specifics. In contrast, AMA president E. Rattcliffe Anderson last January said Lundberg had been fired for publishing an "inappropriate" article on oral sex during President Clinton's impeachment trial.

According to Marshall Kaplan, chief of gastroenterology at Tufts University New England Medical Center in Boston and an associate editor of *NEJM*, Kassirer disagreed sharply with *NEJM's* owners on plans to use the journal's name on other publications. Kaplan mentioned, for example, that the society recently bought *Hippocrates*, a popular journal for physicians, and that it had plans to develop new publications for patients similar to *Heart Watch*, a newsletter it now publishes. Kaplan said he and "most of the editors" feared it would "dilute" the reputation of the *NEJM* to place its name on publications that are less rigorously reviewed. But the medical society, he believes, has decided to increase its revenues to help pay the mortgage on "luxurious" new headquarters it built in the Boston suburb of Waltham. The *NEJM* staff, now ensconced near Harvard Medical School in Brookline, is not eager to relocate to the new building, which opened 2 weeks ago.

Like others, Kaplan described Kassirer as a "very successful editor." Massachusetts Medical Society president Jack Evjy



Irreconcilable differences.
Jerome Kassirer.

also praised Kassirer in a prepared statement last week, saying the editor had redesigned the journal, shortened the turnaround time for manuscript review, and rapidly informed doctors of new medical developments.

But many people were dismayed by what they interpreted as a loss of editorial authority. Epidemiologist Walter Willett of Harvard School of Public Health in Boston says he thinks the society "views the journal as a cash cow and wants to milk it even

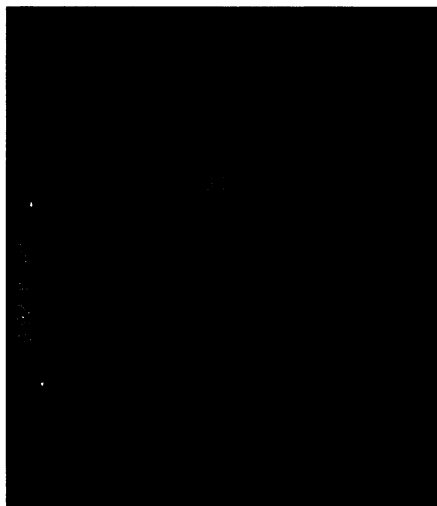
harder." Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet*, says he thinks the Lundberg and Kassirer dismissals highlight "an acute crisis that is developing between the professional values of medicine and corporate values that have overtaken much of U.S. medicine in recent years." Medical journals, he says, are sustained by the trust that readers place in them. Abruptly firing editors, he says, can "damage that trust."

—ELIOT MARSHALL

PLANETARY SCIENCE

Telling Pluto and Its Partner Apart

Scientists have added another compound to the list of organic molecules detected on the solar system's coldest planet. Spectroscopic images show that Pluto harbors ethane, according to astronomers at Japan's Subaru Telescope on Mauna Kea, Hawaii. Their images, released last week, add to the evidence that Pluto and its satellite Charon have very different compositions, suggesting that



Pried apart. Pluto and its moon Charon, never before separated by a ground-based telescope.

ScienceScope

Pardon Ahead? Supporters of Ahn Jae-ku, a jailed 65-year-old Korean mathematician, are hoping that the longtime human rights activist will be freed next month as part of ceremonies for the country's annual Liberation Day on 15 August. Ahn was fired in 1976 from Kyoungbuk University for criticizing the then-military government and was arrested and convicted in 1979 for "antistate" activities. After his release in 1988, he was re-arrested in 1994 for forming a discussion group that was alleged to be working on behalf of North Korea. Last year his life sentence was reduced to 20 years.

Ahn's son, Sae Min, says that President Kim Dae Jung, himself a former political prisoner, "made a promise to many people" during an award ceremony last month in Philadelphia. "That's why I think he'll be freed." Last week the human rights committee of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences sent a letter to Kim urging Ahn's release.

The Big Sweep In a surprising promotion, anthropologist Richard Leakey (right) has been elevated from director of the Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS) to head of the civil service, the highest nonpolitical job in the Kenyan administration. Leakey has been an outspoken critic of Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi, but in announcing the appointment Moi said Leakey has his full support to "change the culture of corruption and inefficiency in our public service." Leakey told *Science* he plans to push for "policies rooted in conservation." Biologist Nehemiah Rotich, head of the East African Wildlife Society and acting director of KWS, is rumored to be a top candidate to succeed Leakey.



Manhattan Bound? The rumors that Harold Varmus, director of the National Institutes of Health, may move to New York City to take charge of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) have been bolstered by a claimed starting date: 1 February 2000. According to researchers at a recent Gordon Conference, that's when Varmus would succeed Paul Marks, who announced his plans to retire in 2000 last year. Varmus was out of town, as was Marks, and neither could be reached for comment. Says an MSKCC press officer: "It's a nice rumor; I just hope it's true."

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