

Francis Collins speaks out

Denmark's powerful databases

How the man in the moon got there

clashes between government and rebel troops continue. Indeed, Thompson recently heard that her station had been looted and her Congolese collaborators had fled heavy fighting in the area.

Nevertheless, several research groups are looking into the possibility of returning to the DRC, whether or not the fighting stops. Photojournalist and conservationist Karl Ammann, for one, believes some limited research might be feasible even now. He traveled to northern DRC in February and says that rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba expressed support for conservation efforts and invited researchers back to the territory his troops control. Many researchers are reluctant to be perceived as supporting the rebels but are eager to return.

"The civil war might take several more years," says bonobo researcher Ellen Van Krunkelsven of the University of Antwerp in Belgium. "We cannot just sit and wait," she says, because bonobos might not have that long.

—GRETCHEN VOGEL

FRANCE

Allègre Loses Job, Research Split Off

PARIS—Geochemist Claude Allègre was dumped this week as France's minister of research and education in a Cabinet reshuffle. Allègre, whose 3-year tenure invoked strong reaction from scientists and a series of protests and recent school closings from the powerful teachers' unions, was replaced on 27 March by Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg, a lawyer and veteran politician. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin also sacked three other ministers and split Allègre's domain into two smaller ministries, with Jack Lang, a former culture minister, taking the education portfolio.

Firing Allègre was not an easy step for Jospin, who has known the scientist since their university days 40 years ago. But for many researchers and teachers, Allègre had become the man they loved to hate. Allègre combined far-reaching reform proposals with an aggressive, combative style, and the mix was highly combustible (*Science*, 4

February, p. 781). With support for his Socialist government slipping, Jospin apparently had little choice but to dump Allègre and other unpopular ministers.

Allègre's departure leaves researchers wondering about the views of his replacement, who has no background in science. A professor of civil law at the University of Paris, Schwartzberg served as secretary of state for education before being elected to the National Assembly in 1986. However, an initial interview with the French radio station France Info, in which Schwartzberg stressed the importance of research to economic growth and pledged to encourage French industry to invest more in science, has some French scientists hoping for the best. Many researchers criticized Allègre sharply for pushing them to link up with industry without putting similar pressure on companies to take research more seriously. "Nothing was done to induce industry to treat research as other than a furnisher" of raw data, says Harry Bernas, a physicist at the University of Paris's Orsay campus.

Allègre's director of research, geophysicist Vincent Courtillot, says his boss had launched much-needed reforms. He cites the creation of hundreds of new research positions in the universities and of a fund to allow young researchers to gain independence early

and start their own labs as examples of Allègre's commitment to research. Ironically, Allègre's departure came just days after part of his controversial reform package of the basic research agency CNRS was approved by its executive board. Two key elements, CNRS president Edouard Brézin told *Science*, are "greater freedom" to set its own research agenda and the creation of a "fully independent scientific council."

The reshuffling leaves unclear the status of Courtillot, a longtime Allègre colleague and his right-hand man at the ministry. And although many French scientists may rejoice at Allègre's departure, they agree on the need to shake up French research. "He was asking a lot of the right questions," says Bernas, "but giving the wrong answers."

—MICHAEL BALTER

With additional reporting by Peter Coles in Paris.

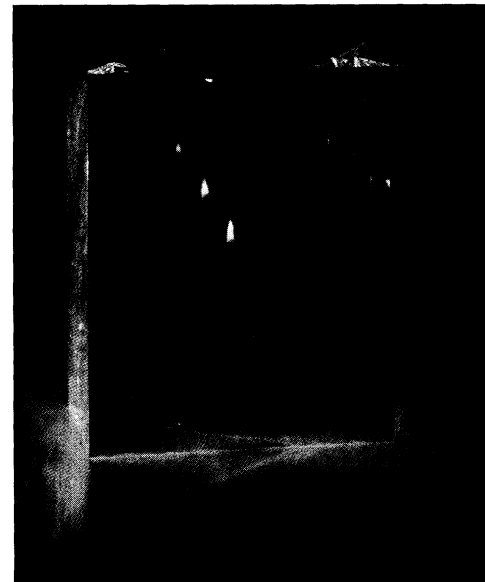


Gone. Allègre became a liability for the Jospin government.

MATERIALS SCIENCE

Mirror Film Is the Fairest of Them All

Imagine holding a rainbow in your hand—a flimsy plastic bag that glistens red, blue, green, violet, yellow, and orange as light bounces off it from different angles. Imagine holding another flimsy bag that is a perfect mirror for light waves oscillating in one direction, or polarization, while transparent for others. Now combine the two, and you can begin to picture the dance of light on a new plastic film produced by researchers at



Bright idea. Layered plastic can be tailored to play new tricks with light.

the 3M Corp. in St. Paul, Minnesota, and reported for the first time on page 2451.

The new material is an assembly of thin, alternating layers of two common plastics that reflect different colors and amounts of light depending on the angle at which the light strikes them. And unlike previous multilayer mirrors, which are best at reflecting light that's traveling perpendicular to the mirror's surface, the new films can reflect light coming in at all angles equally well. That's likely to make them useful for everything from improving the light emission from laptop computer displays to funneling outdoor light deep inside buildings.

"It looks like a nice idea that can be used in a general way," says Shaul Mukamel, a chemical physicist and optics expert at the