News of Science

Nine-to-Eight Vote Sends Strauss Nomination to Senate

By a vote of 9 to 8, the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, on 19 May, sent the nomination of Lewis L. Strauss as secretary of commerce to the Senate floor. Thus, Strauss, who has been acting secretary since his recess appointment on 13 November, has weathered one of the longest and most bitter confirmation fights since the Coolidge administration. But the fight is not over for Strauss, who made many enemies during his 5-year tenure as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. A similar but less severe challenge to his confirmation is expected to develop in the full Senate. Nevertheless, the critical test has been passed.

Three Democratic Votes Decisive

Had the 11 Democrats on the Senate committee voted in a block, as the Republican members did, the nomination would have been killed. However, Pastore (D-R.I.), Thurmond (D-S.C.), and Lausche (D-Ohio), acting in accord with previously announced intentions, cast the three votes which, with the Republicans' six decided the issue for Strauss. The vote ended the hearings, which had begun more than 2 months earlier when committee chairman Wayne Magnuson (D-Wash.), who voted against the nomination, warned Strauss that there was a long and hard fight ahead.

Heavy Opposition

Opposition to the nomination came from several sources. Senator Clinton P. Anderson (D-N.M.), who had been chairman of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee of Congress during much of Strauss' tenure as AEC chairman, led the attack by concentrating on the conduct of the nominee during that period. He suggested that Strauss had "sought to create myths about his accomplishments," and that he had "made deliberate efforts to avoid keeping the joint committee . . . informed." Anderson was joined in this criticism by members of the Federation of American Scientists, represented by their incoming chairman, David R. Inglis. A former chairman of the group, David L. Hill, continued the attack with more than 25 pages of prepared testimony. Another opponent was Senator Kefauver, who cited certain of Strauss' actions in regard to the Dixon-Yates controversy.

The criticism of the witnesses was directed as much at Strauss' personality as at his actions as AEC chairman. Hill, in his testimony, suggested that the nominee had demonstrated a number of character defects during his AEC chairmanship that made him a bad risk in his new position. He suggested that Strauss has a "facility for repeated misrepresentation," that he had been guilty of "arrogant usurpation of authority and responsibility," and that his "personal vindictiveness toward those who have disagreed with his official positions" had moved him to misuse the personnel security system of the government.

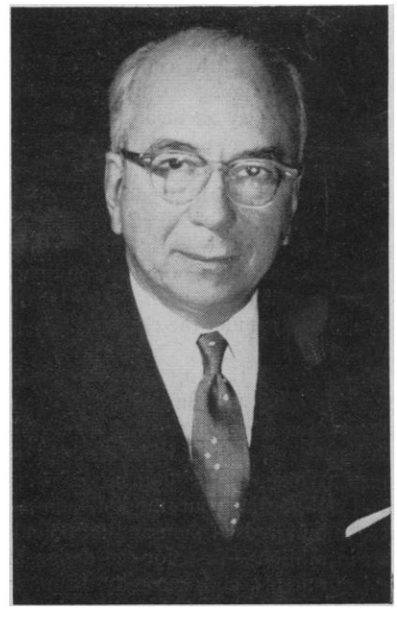
Supporters Cite Contributions

Speaking for Strauss before the committee were a number of scientists, administrators, and political figures. Edward Teller, the nuclear physicist, said that Strauss had demonstrated a "long-standing, warm, and effective support of science." Other witnesses, who in the main simply answered questions put to them by committee members, agreed that Strauss was a friend of science. John W. Bricker, former senator from Ohio, said that during his service on the Joint Atomic Energy Committee he had seen no evidence that Strauss had withheld information from the committee. Detlev W. Bronk, president of the National Academy of Sciences, cited five occasions when he had had contact with Strauss in past years. Each, he said, was characterized by complete cooperation on Strauss' part. When asked if he had noticed the arrogance or dogmatism that the hostile witnesses had mentioned, Bronk said he had not and added that he imagined that during his own career as an administrator a number of his subordinates had found him dogmatic and difficult, especially when he had had to refuse a request for more funds or for another secretary. Strauss' influence on the decision to make the fusion bomb, also cited by witnesses in his behalf, particularly impressed the committee because of its significance for the national defense.

During the course of the long hearings President Eisenhower spoke out a number of times in favor of Strauss. "I think," the President declared at a news conference, "that Secretary Strauss is one of the finest public servants I have known." ". . . I have never heard one single word against his character, against his honesty and his ability and therefore I am really puzzled as to why this delay should occur."

Some Reasons for Delay

A number of factors seemed to lie behind the long struggle over Strauss' nomination. Perhaps foremost, according to some observers, is a singular confluence of events. There is, as the hostile witnesses made clear, a solid body of opinion against the nominee. Apart from the hearings, this was demonstrated by the resistance that developed when it was learned that he was scheduled to address the American Physical Society on 1 May. Many members of the society formed a "Last Strauss Committee" to prevent his appearance. This action, although unsuccessful, indicated that the Federation of American Scientists was not alone in its reaction. This body of opinion of itself would have made the confirmation hearings difficult for Strauss. Another factor, however, came into play against him. This was the unusual predisposition of the Democratic Congress to question the qualifications of the President's various appointees to



Lewis L. Strauss

office. In past years these confirmation hearings were usually matters of routine. Recently, however, Congress has been nothing less than militant in its attitude toward Eisenhower's nominees for various posts of government. If the Senate does not cause such a furor that the appointee resigns, as Clare Booth Luce did, it rebukes the President for delay, as it did by rushing through its confirmation of Herter as Secretary of State in a matter of hours. This new exercise of power on the part of the Congress compounded Strauss' trials. The question for the immediate future is whether this same combination of positive opposition and a rampant Congress will work against him when the full Senate votes.

Britain Launches Space Program

Britain has announced the immediate start of a space research program. In an address before the House of Commons in mid-May, Prime Minister Macmillan described the initial plans. He explained that there are two problems to be considered: the nature and design of the instruments to be carried into space and the means by which the containers for these instruments are to be launched. He went on to say that, with regard to the first, a program has been approved and work will begin at once. With regard to the second, he commented that "there may well be scope for joint action with the United States . . . or with other countries."

He then reported that a team of specialists, headed by H. S. W. Massey, professor of physics at University College, London, will visit Washington toward the middle of June to discuss possible Anglo-American cooperation. Simultaneously, consultations are being held with the Commonwealth countries. While these talks are going on, however, studies are under way on means of adapting British military rockets to launch satellites. Macmillan said: "This will put us in a position, should we decide to do so, to make an all-British effort." The instrument program will be supervised by the British National Committee on Space Research, which has been set up by the Royal Society under the chairmanship of Massey.

In discussing the cost of the program, the Prime Minister commented: "I cannot give any figure of the cost of using a British rocket, should it be decided to do so. What we are doing now is to spend substantial, but modest, sums—more in hundreds of thousands of pounds than in millions—first, for the design of the instruments, and, secondly, to make the necessary designs for modification of the military rocket. . . ."

A Labour member of the House asked the Prime Minister if he was "satisfied that there is an intrinsic value in this work from the scientific point of view, rather than just an attempt to keep up with the Joneses." Macmillan replied: "I am not, by nature or by education, very favourably inclined to swallow all that the scientists tell me, because I, alas, do not understand it [laughter]. But I am impressed by the universal opinion of those very distinguished people whom we have consulted, and I feel that certainly upon the scientific instrument work it is clear that Britain should play her part in this advancing scientific effort [Ministerial cheers]."

Space a Public Issue

The enthusiastic response to these remarks reflects the degree to which a space program has become a public issue in Britain. The Government has long been under pressure from the Labour Party opposition and from a growing number of British scientists to enter the field of space, an area of scientific inquiry that has until now been monopolized by the United States and the Soviet Union. British space research has been postponed primarily because of the great cost involved. Those who have objected to the launching of a space program have pointed out that the results of such research were already available from the United States and, to a lesser extent, from the U.S.S.R.

However, a number of British scientists interested in space have taken jobs in the United States. This, and considerations of national pride, have disturbed some members of Parliament. In replying to a question in the House of Commons on 20 April, according to the 2 May issue of *Nature,* the Minister of Supply acknowledged that the danger of losing Britain's "youngest and ablest scientists to the United States in the absence of occasional opportunities for such research, even if it involved using equipment originally designed for a specific military purpose, was an important consideration."

British scientists have also been stirred by feelings of concern for the nation's prestige, and Sir Harold Spencer Jones, former Astronomer Royal, expressed the view of many when he wrote as follows in a feature article in the *Sunday Times* of 5 April:

"It has been suggested that our scientists might plan experiments and design and construct the instrumental equipment for research with satellites and space-probes and ask for space in vehicles launched by another country. That, however, would not be appropriate to the prestige and standing of Britain in the world today.

"As a matter of national prestige, and because Britain's future depends upon keeping abreast of new developments, I am of the opinion that Britain cannot afford to stay outside this new field, and that she should embark upon a program of space research."

Scope of Britain's Space Plans

A special dispatch from London to the *New York Times* on 23 April indicated the direction of British space research when it quoted high government officials as saying that Britain's objective in any earth-satellite program would be basic research. This would be in contrast to what Britain regards as the emphasis put on engineering by the United States. Another distinction, the *Times* said, is the preoccupation in the United States with exploring space for the ultimate purpose of space travel, for Britain is more interested in the terrestrial usefulness of space exploration.

An idea of the probable time-scale for the British space research program and of the issues that remain to be decided was provided by a press conference that was held by Lord Hailsham, Lord President of the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy, immediately after the Prime Minister's announcement to Parliament. Conference participants, in addition to Massey, included other principal figures in British space administration: Aubrey Jones, Minister of Supply; Sir Owen Wansbrough-Jones, chief scientist of the Ministry of Supply; and Sir Edward Bullard, chairman of a steering group appointed by Hailsham.

Massey indicated that on his United States trip, in addition to seeking details about U.S. earth satellites, he will discuss an American offer to launch another country's satellite, perhaps one of approximately 150 pounds. A British vehicle of about 1000 pounds was mentioned as a possibility at the conference. The U.S. offer was made to COSPAR, the international committee for space research that was established by the International Council of Scientific Unions.

The *New York Times,* in commenting on the press conference, indicated that the newsmen's questions reflected what appeared to be disappointment that the first British satellite might have to be launched by means of a U.S. rocket. One questioner was reported to have asked Massey if he would say "on the record" whether or not he was satisfied with a satellite launching in which the rocket used was not of British manufacture. Massey was quoted as having replied: "I will go on record as saying that I am not at all dissatisfied with this project."

Sir Edward Bullard discussed the space program time-schedule with the