Science in the News

Inauguration Week: Ike's Farewell Address; Reorganizing the AEC; Rules Committee Maneuvers

The prestige of science reached a new height of sorts last week as the retiring President, in his farewell address, warned the country to guard against unwarranted influence by two groups: "the military-industrial complex" and a "scientific-technological elite." His point was that the country is spending more than half the federal budget on the military and that half the scientific research in the country is being underwritten in the name of national security.

The enormous amounts of money being spent naturally give power to the military, industrial, and scientific authorities who handle the work, power that is accentuated both by the need to turn to those who are given the money to spend for the necessary expert advice on *how* it should be spent, and because of the ability of these groups to appeal over the heads of their legal superiors to Congress and to the public, always in the name of national security, for more power and more money. (In his press conference the next day Eisenhower cited the example of the expensive, full page ads he was seeing everywhere, designed to build up support for this or that expensive missile or other research and development project.)

This interpretation, suggested by members of his staff, emphasizes Eisenhower's concern about scientists as a part of what has come to be known as the "defense lobby," actually a complex of lobbies insisting that one thing or another is necessary for national security and adding up to general pressure to increase spending above whatever it might happen to be at the moment.

Eisenhower's warning was regarded as worth while by a good many people in Washington who disagree with his philosophy of government, but they were thinking of something different from what the retiring president had in mind.

Eisenhower has been widely criticized, of course, for his reluctance to increase federal support for one area or another, but particularly science, education, and defense, and these criticisms, although reaching their widest audience through the voices of his political and journalistic critics, have been based largely on what "the experts"—scientific, educational, or military—have insisted was necessary in the interests of national security.

This was an annoying situation for Eisenhower; for although it was getting increasingly hard to argue with the experts, to accept their views implied that it would be necessary to abandon his firmly set beliefs in keeping government as small as possible and in resisting further government interference in the free enterprise economy. He was naturally worried about this "military-industrial complex," this "scientific-technological elite" that would, it seemed to him, if given a free hand, change American society into something quite different from the society he had known and believed in.

Mood of the Farewell

The pressure of the arguments from this "elite" led him to endorse the recent paper of his Science Advisory Committee that explicitly put "primary responsibility" for advanced scientific education and for basic research on the federal government, but his heart was not in it. There were scant signs that this sort of thinking influenced his final budget, and his misgivings showed up in the warning in his farewell address of "the prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by federal employment, project allocations, and the power of [federal] money." The farewell address, more eloquent and moving than any speech he had given in a long time, expressed the feelings of a man who deeply felt he had served the country well in resisting the forces of a change toward stronger and bigger central government, about to retire in favor of a man who seemed to go out of his way to identify himself with those forces. He said later that the farewell was the last speech he would make, and he wished Kennedy well, but it is doubtful that he will find himself able to remain silent for very long. The farewell warnings are likely to be repeated.

But the mood of Washington, reflected in the eagerness with which the city awaited Kennedy's assumption of power, was not with Eisenhower. There was a good deal of support for Walter Lippmann's assertion that Eisenhower was "out of date." The Kennedy people are concerned about the defense lobby not so much as a lobby for more spending, for they are for more spending, but as a conglomeration of lobbies, each demanding support for its pet projects. The problem of the President, in this situation, is to assert domination in order to see that the money is spent and the effort is organized as the national interest demands, not as several dozen competing groups, each made up of an assortment of military, bureaucratic, industrial, scientific, and political figures would try to have it spent based on each group's belief, from its special point of view, that its interests are synonymous with the national interest.

The Kennedy people do not expect to be wholly successful, but they criticize Eisenhower for failing to offer strong enough leadership to be nearly as successful as he could have been. We will get a chance to see what Kennedy can do when he tackles the problem of the space and missile effort, which everyone complains is being mismanaged through the lack of strong leadership, and which will probably provide the new Administration with its first test of strength with the assorted interests of the defense lobby.

Reorganizing the AEC

During the week it became known that there would probably be fairly prompt action on another, less controversial, problem of organization. For several years now there have been complaints about the dual role of the Atomic Energy Commission as both

promoter of civilian uses of atomic energy and as a regulatory agency supposed to prevent uses of atomic energy where undue hazards might be involved. The critics have pointed out, and the AEC has agreed, that there is a built-in conflict of interest within the AEC as it tries both to speed up civilian use of the atom and to slow it down to protect the public safety.

Proposal for New Agency

Such apparently conflicting interests as the United Auto Workers, which feels its people are being endangered, and the Detroit Edison Company, which is building a plant, have both come out for setting up a separate agency to handle the regulatory functions. But Chet Holifield of California, the new chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, and a supporter of strict regulation, has recently said he did not see where a separate regulatory agency was likely for several more years. The basic argument against a separate agency has been, and continues to be, that even though a separate agency may be desirable in theory, as a practical matter only the AEC now has the expertise to handle the job.

But aside from this, not many people are interested in setting up still another regulatory agency at a time when most of those that exist are being criticized as inefficient, too subject to influence by the people they are supposed to regulate, and in some cases, such as the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Power Commission, virtually incompetent to handle their jobs.

The AEC has now come up with a compromise plan which would separate the regulatory functions from the rest of the agency, with the chief regulatory officer reporting directly to the five commissioners. The AEC general manager, who now has over-all supervision of all activities, will no longer have any control over the regulatory side of the agency. The planned changes have general support within the AEC and with the Joint Committee and apparently will be put into effect promptly unless Glenn T. Seaborg, the new chairman appointed by Kennedy last week, disapproves.

Reaction to Seaborg

Seaborg's appointment, incidentally, received an unenthusiastic response from the joint committee, primarily because he was not well known to the committee, but partly on the grounds that a scientist would soon find himself fed up with the involved politics of the AEC. Some of the committee staff were prepared to put a little money on the proposition that he would not last out the year.

But Seaborg has been serving as chancellor of the University of California, and presumably has already gotten more than a taste of political infighting, although perhaps that is not enough to prepare a man for the Washington jungle. Seaborg has also been serving on the Science Advisory Committee, but that group, to the considerable annoyance of Congress, has been pretty well shielded from Washington politics by their status as confidential advisers to the President.

Rules Committee

Meanwhile it was widely, although not universally, assumed that Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House, had assured the reform of the House Rules Committee, which in the past has served as a burying ground for the type of legislation that Kennedy will need.

The final results should be known by the time this appears. But well before the vote was scheduled a leader of the liberal bloc in the House was exuding both confidence that Rayburn would succeed and admiration for Rayburn as a master of political strategy. The source has been a member of Congress for nearly 20 years, but he could always learn something new from Mr. Sam, he said, and this time he had learned a lesson about the importance of timing in the art of politics.

It had been assumed that Rayburn would try to take control of the Rules Committee away from Howard Smith and his ultraconservative coalition either by pushing through a rule to enlarge the committee on opening day, when the House adopts its rules for the session, or by purging William Colmer of Mississippi when the House Democrats nominated their committee members.

To try to change the rules after opening day seemed especially difficult, for then the rules change would have to go through the Rules Committee in order to reach a vote on the floor, and it hardly seemed likely that the conservative coalition on the committee could be persuaded to assist in its own demise.

In fact, though, this unlikely situation was guaranteed last week when Judge Smith publicly pledged himself not to block the rules change that would take control of the committee away from him. He did so after Rayburn had convinced him that if he failed to make the commitment Colmer would be purged, an alternative which the Judge decided was slightly more distasteful than packing the committee.

The advantages of Rayburn's tactics, his admirers say, were that they gave him time to solidify support for the change among conservative Southerners and thus to diminish the risk that enough conservative Democrats would join with conservative Republicans to defeat the proposal; that by making it clear that he was in a position to purge Colmer he was able to make the alternative of merely packing the committee appear to be a conciliatory compromise by comparison, thus getting done what needed to be done while arousing a minimum of hard feeling among people whose cooperation would be needed later in the session; and that, finally, by putting off the debate over the rules change until some time after opening day he had prevented the headlines about the convening of the new Congress from being dominated by an intraparty squabble among the Democrats.

By the time the Democrats met last week to take a position on the rules change, Rayburn had gotten enough support that Judge Smith conceded "I know when I'm beaten," and most of the Southerners who might have supported Smith sat passively silent while a voice vote in the caucus endorsed the change. A Republican caucus later went on record asking its members to oppose the rules change, but there were enough liberal Republicans who intended to vote for the change to make defeat of the proposal unlikely, although not unthinkable.

The expected success of the rules change also suggested something about the power of a strong president. The reform would have to go through despite the weakening of liberal forces in the House in the past election. But with Kennedy in the White House Rayburn could, and apparently did, persuade a few recalcitrants to go along by reminding them that if they failed to go along "you'll not only be on my list, you'll be on the list of someone higher up." He used a blunt four-letter word to characterize the type of list he had in mind.—H.M.