Environmental Quality: Nixon's New Council Raises Doubts

The "new conservation" concept that government and industry should take careful account of the impact of their activities on the total environment, viewed as a complex of intricately related natural systems, has come into high vogue in Washington in recent years. Even the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, superintendent of the congressional pork barrel, has been hiring ecologists and promising to give a new emphasis to environmental studies in its project planning. Credit for spreading the gospel of the new conservation belongs in good part to the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations and, more particularly, to their Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall. Now, it is up to the Nixon Administration to see if the federal departments and agencies can be coaxed or goaded into actually living by the newly proclaimed faith.

Though vague in the abstract, this gospel has a meaning which conservationists find all too clear in situations where it has been ignored. They note, for example, that the Atomic Energy Commission is licensing nuclear-fired steam electric generating plants without due regard for the thermal pollution problems these plants may cause. Also, there is the plight of the Everglades National Park, which has been hurt by a Corps of Engineers flood control project in central Florida that has upset the park's hydraulic regime, and which is now threatened by a jetport being built nearby with the help of grants from the Department of Transportation.

And conservationists point, too, to the oil-smeared shores of Santa Barbara Channel, where the Department of the Interior's failure to ascertain the hazards of allowing drilling into an oil-bearing formation lying only a few hundred feet beneath the sea bottom contributed to the disastrous well blowout there. Such examples of serious harm resulting from failure to weigh the possible environmental consequences of public and private undertakings are common, and threats to natural areas are not all that is involved —instances of highway builders, urban renewal authorities, and private developers doing damage to "urban ecology" are numerous and well-documented.

In his first major step in dealing with the problem of environmental protection, President Nixon, on 29 May, issued an executive order establishing a new interagency Environment Quality Council, naming himself chairman, Vice President Agnew as vice chairman, and Lee A. DuBridge, his science adviser, as executive secretary.* The president said that the new council will review existing policies and programs, project the environmental impact of new technologies, and "encourage scientific developments which will help us protect our resources." "We have become victims of our own technological genius," Nixon said, though adding that the new council would provide the strategy for a "high quality of life" and the means to implement that strategy.

The appointment of a new interagency council stirs little excitement in Washington, for such bodies have been numerous and their record of accomplishment has been small. In fact, President Nixon's new council will replace President Johnson's Council on Recreation and Natural Beauty, a body of deservedly little renown. Such interagency councils, though established in answer to problems felt to be important enough to demand the concerted attention of the cabinet secretaries, generally have promised more than they have delivered because (i) cabinet secretaries are too hard-pressed by other duties to regularly attend council meetings themselves, and (ii) one secretary or agency head tends to overlook the mote in the eye of another, all knowing that in such mutual forbearance lies the best hope of escaping troublesome criticism. (President Johnson's science adviser, Donald F. Hornig, once told an interviewer that the Federal Council for Science and Technology, a subcabinet-level body which he chaired, had had some success in resolving conflicts between agencies; he said, however, that its members generally were unwilling to criticize each other's agency policies and programs.)

The shortcomings seemingly inherent in interagency councils were on the minds of the members of the Senate Interior Committee in April when the committee was taking up the question of what kind of White House advisory apparatus on environmental policy would be best. Although the President had not yet set up his new council, he was planning to do so, and DuBridge appeared before the committee to explain how, this time, such a council really could be made to work.

According to DuBridge, President Nixon himself would preside over the council meetings, just as he was usually presiding over the Council of Urban Affairs which he established shortly after taking office. "This [urban affairs] council, too, is composed of cabinet members, with the President as the active—and, I assure you—very vigorous and interested chairman," DuBridge said. In such a council, he added, "tasks can be assigned then and there to the proper cabinet officer or to a group or committee of cabinet officers. Things decided upon can be implemented instantly, by Presidential directive."

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel, the only member of the new council whose principal concern is environmental matters, also said he felt the council would be an effective policy-making mechanism. Despite these assurances, however, Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, chairman of the Interior Committee, and a number of other senators expressed skepticism. Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, for example, told Hickel: "Everybody here knows that there are 300 hours of time demanded of the President for every hour that the poor man who holds that responsibility can give. In all due respect, the President is just too harassed. I just quite frankly don't think he can devote the necessary time to this problem." This view was shared by Lynton K. Caldwell, profes-

* Other members of the Council are: Secretary of Agriculture Clifford M. Hardin; Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans; Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Robert H. Finch; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development George W. Romney; Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel; Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe; and such other department and agency heads as the President may designate. The director of the Bureau of the Budget, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Executive Secretary of the Council for Urban Affairs may attend council meetings as observers. Council members may designate alternates when they are unable to attend meetings personally.

sor of government at Indiana University and a committee witness, who observed that the nation was looking too much to the White House for leadership on too many issues. "The country is too big, the issues are too complex, to make this a realistic attitude," Caldwell said. "And we do not have yet, even in the President, a superman."

Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, chairman of the Senate Air and Water Pollution Subcommittee, takes a more positive view of the President's new council—provided it is supported by adequate staff work. He has introduced a bill, cosponsored by some 40 senators, which would set up an Office of Environmental Quality in the executive office of the President. The director of this new office could be the President's science adviser, or someone else, whom the President chooses.

Senator Jackson, Muskie's rival claimant in the Senate for the title of Mr. Environment, has developed a proposal which, while not directly in conflict with the Muskie bill, takes a different approach. It would establish in the Office of the President a three-member council on environmental quality, a body which would be analogous to the council of economic advisers. In Jackson's concept, this would be a body of three wise men to whom the President and his interagency council could look for "independent and impartial" advice.

The Jackson bill, which former Secretary of the Interior Udall supports, also spells out a national policy encouraging a "productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment"; more than that, it would require that proposals for federal projects be examined from the standpoint of their impact on the environment. The agencies concerned would have to certify, among other things, that any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided are "justified by stated considerations of national policy." According to an aide, Senator Jackson expects his measure to receive favorable Senate action this year.

In the House, Representative John Dingell of Detroit, chairman of the wildlife subcommittee of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, is sponsoring a bill similar to Jackson's, and he, too, will press for floor action this year. A staff man says that, thus far, it appears that the bill has no opposition, though there are other congressmen pursuing ideas of their own.

Perennially, there are proposals to revamp the bureaucracy. This year,

Academy Changes Army Gas Dump Plan

A National Academy of Sciences panel last week urged the U.S. Army to modify its plans to ship surplus chemical weapons across country by rail and then dump them into the Atlantic Ocean. Citing the possibility of a "catastrophic" accident, the panel recommended that the Army deactivate as many of the weapons as possible at their present storage points and dump only those weapons for which no other disposal method is feasible. The Army promptly announced that it would carry out some of the Academy group's recommendations and would study the others.

The Army had originally intended to ship some 27,000 tons of chemical weapons from as far away as Denver, Colo., to the Naval Ammunition Depot at Earle, N.J., where they were to be loaded on four old Liberty ships, towed at least 145 miles out to sea, and then sunk with the ships in at least 7200 feet of water. But critics in Congress charged that a railroad accident might spew lethal chemicals over the countryside and that the chemicals might cause serious ecological damage to the ocean (*Science*, 20 June 1969, p. 1376).

The Academy panel, which was headed by George B. Kistiakowsky,* Harvard chemist and science adviser to the late President Eisenhower, generally agreed with the critics. It recommended that two of the five chemical materials involved be deactivated and that the other three be dumped in the ocean only as a last resort. Although the Army had previously argued that deactivation was time-consuming, costly, and dangerous, the panel said the government should minimize risks to humans and the environment "even though this may complicate and make more costly its own operations."

The panel said that clusters of bomblets loaded with GB, a liquid nerve gas, should be disassembled and neutralized chemically by acid or alkaline hydrolysis. It said that under the Army's original plans there was a "remote possibility" that a "catastrophic explosion" could be caused by a sniper's bullet or a railroad or ship collision. The Pentagon, on 27 June, indicated it would carry out this recommendation.

The panel also said that liquid mustard agent, which is currently stored in bulk containers, should be burned in government establishments where local air pollution would not be a serious problem. The panel said that while there was virtually no danger of a catastrophic accident with mustard, it was concerned about possible adverse effects on the oceanic ecosphere when the mustard eventually leaked out of its containers. The Pentagon also agreed to comply with this recommendation.

The panel said the other three materials involved—namely, GB nerve gas rockets imbedded in concrete and steel "coffins," steel containers contaminated by toxic chemicals, and canisters of CS riot control agent imbedded in drums filled with concrete—could be dumped at sea without serious harm if no other suitable means of disposal can be found. However, the panel urged the Army to convene a group of technical and demolition experts to determine if it is feasible to demilitarize the nerve gas rockets, and the Army agreed to form such a group.

The Academy study, by implication, pointed to two glaring oversights on the part of the Army. It noted that while "various chemical warfare agents have been repeatedly disposed of in the oceans by the United States and other nations . . . we have no information regarding possible deleterious effects of these operations on the ecosphere of the seas." The panel also suggested that the Army should assume that all chemical weapons will require eventual disposal and should consequently build disposal facilities that will not require dumping at sea.—P.M.B.

* Other members included Frederick Bellinger, Georgia Tech; Kenneth P. DuBois, University of Chicago; Carl M. Lathrop, Esso Research and Engineering Co.; Stephen Lawroski, Argonne National Laboratory; Colin M. MacLeod, Commonwealth Fund; Matthew S. Meselson, Harvard; N. M. Newmark, University of Illinois; Donald W. Pritchard, Johns Hopkins; John H. Ryther, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution; John C. Sheehan, M.I.T.; and James L. Whittenberger, Harvard School of Public Health. Staff director was Martin A. Paul.

Representative Emilio Q. Daddario of Connecticut, chairman of the science subcommittee of the Committee on Science and Astronautics, has a bill to establish a Department of Resources, Environment, and Population. A key idea here is that, unless resources and population are kept in balance, conservation efforts are sure to fail. In the Senate, Frank Moss of Utah, Clifford Case of New Jersey, and Mike Gravel of Alaska also are proposing the establishment of a new agency, theirs to be called the Department of Conservation and the Environment. The Department of the Interior would be abolished, with most of the bureaus now within it being absorbed by the new department. But units such as the Office of Oil and Gas and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries would be transferred to the Department of Commerce. While this would relieve some of the conflicts now present within the Department of the Interior, it would obviously create new problems of coordination.

Political interest in the environmental-quality issue is such that it seems likely that, within the next year or so, legislation of some sort will be enacted in an effort to improve decision-making in this field. According to Senator Jackson, there is now "general agreement" between him and the Nixon Administration on the need for his proposed council of environmental advisers. Actually, the Administration's attitude seems to be more one of acquiescence in the Jackson proposal than of wholehearted endorsement. There is, in fact, reason to think that the Muskie bill setting up an office to support the President's interagency council comes closer to the Administration's desires.

But whatever the nature of the new mechanisms which it may ultimately prescribe, Congress is putting the heat on the Administration to deliver on its promises to translate the "new conservation" from doctrine into practice.

—LUTHER J. CARTER

Campus Unrest: Congress Ponders Federal Sanctions on Universities

An effort to translate public resentment against campus disorders into federal sanctions has in recent weeks tied the House Education and Labor Committee in knots. At the center of the dispute is a proposal which would make possible the cutoff of federal aid, including research funds, to an institution of higher education which failed to certify to the Commissioner of Education that it has published rules and regulations for insuring orderly discussion of campus issues and set standards of conduct for students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors. Present education legislation already calls for the revoking of federal assistance under certain circumstances to individuals involved in campus violence.

On Tuesday, as *Science* went to press, the Education and Labor Committee by narrow margins first voted down the provision which would have allowed a cutoff of federal funds to institutions of higher education and then sent back the bill to subcommittee for further consideration. Recommittal of a bill often signals its demise.

Proponents of the new measure insisted that only enactment of a moderate measure such as theirs would forestall the passage of repressive legislation by colleagues bent on punishing students, faculty, and administrators for their errant behavior in campus confrontations. Opponents argued that enactment would set a dire precedent of federal intervention in the internal affairs of the universities and cloud the future of relations between the federal government and higher education.

The deadlock in the committee has probably been encouraged by the current absence of dynamism on Capitol Hill. The Democratic leadership has been sounding a very uncertain trumpet, and the new Administration has shown a definite wariness about committing itself on controversial issues. Education Commissioner James E. Allen has made no bones about his opposition to the principle embodied in the new bill and told the committee "we do not believe that legislation that would punish the entire university, that would hold up possibly the operation of the university because of loss of (federal) funds, is a proper approach." However, the higher the official in the Administration hierarchy, the less specific have been the statements on campus unrest. Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Secretary Robert Finch and President Nixon have both subscribed to the view that it's up to the colleges and universities to keep their houses in order. But Finch was out of Washington on vacation as the impasse on the legislation developed; President Nixon has not really gone beyond his statement of very general principles of 22 March, in which he called the federal sanctions against individuals "moderate" and "justified," but said it is the task of the instiution to maintain discipline. A definitive expression of attitude on the measure by the Administration would no doubt have sped resolution of the issue. On balance, Administration reticence probably contributed to the blocking action.

The issue has split the Education and Labor Committee on cross-party lines. A majority of Democrats have opposed the measure, while a majority of Republicans supported it. However, committee chairman Carl D. Perkins, a Kentucky Democrat, and three Democratic subcommittee chairmen were lined up behind Mrs. Edith Green (D–Ore.), chairman of the subcommittee which handles higher education legislation and chief exponent of the bill. Opposing the measure have been two Democratic subcommittee chairmen, Frank Thompson of New Jersey and John Brademas of Indiana, a chief tactician for the opposition, a solid phalanx of junior Democrats, and Republican Ogden Reid of New York. Republican William A. Steiger of Wisconsin announced a switch to the opposition after he participated in a tour of campuses with 21 other younger Republican House members.

On Tuesday the balance changed slightly in favor of the opposition, notably with the shift of Perkins. Marvin Esch (R–Mich.), whose vote had been somewhat in doubt, also voted with the opposition. Esch too had made