

Senate Forms Special Panel to Study Committee System

On 31 March the Senate passed a resolution (S.Res. 109) creating a temporary select committee to study the Senate committee system. A chief objective of the panel is to recommend a rationalization of a system now plagued by a proliferation of committees and subcommittees and conflicts of jurisdiction. Most observers concur that energy and scientific matters are areas in which jurisdiction is most highly fragmented.

One senator whose territorial boundaries might well be infringed upon if a realignment of committee jurisdictions were to follow the pattern that now prevails in the House would be Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.). Kennedy's chairmanship of subcommittees with authorization power over health research and the National Science Foundation give him something of a corner on civilian science policy in the Senate.

The new Senate select committee held an organizing meeting on 29 April and named Senator Adlai E. Stevenson (D-Ill.) as chairman and Senator William E. Brock (R-Tenn.) as cochairman.* Under terms of the resolution the committee "would be authorized to make a thorough study of the committee system—including the structure, jurisdiction, number and the optimum size of each, the number of subcommittees, committee rules and procedures, and the subjects related thereto, including the referral of legislation falling within the jurisdiction of two or more committees."

Reorganization of the committee system is, of course, more easily resolved than accomplished. Changes in committee structure, rules, and spheres of influence are perhaps the most sensitive issues in Congress and likely to inspire vigorous opposition from the most senior, influential, and obviously most self-interested members—the committee and subcommittee chairmen.

The Senate is following in the footsteps of the House in its effort at committee reform. Despite making fairly sweeping changes in its rules and procedures, the House decided against major alterations in committee jurisdictions (*Science*, 25 October 1974) recommended by a panel headed by Representative Richard Bolling (D-Mo.). Instead, the House passed a much milder alternative, leaving the status quo largely unravished.

An exception was the action of reconstituting the Science and Astronautics Committee as the new Committee on Science and Technology. The old House committee already had jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation and the Bureau of Standards as well as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Under the reorganization the committee acquired authority over a clutch of R & D programs relating to environmental protection and energy (except for nuclear energy).

The same sort of transformation seems to be coveted by the Senate Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee, chaired by Senator Frank E. Moss (D-Utah). When Moss took over the committee chairmanship 3 years ago, it was assumed that he would seek to broaden the scope of the committee, which had been limited effectively to the space

program, then moving into partial eclipse. The precedent of the House space committee's transition was a clear one, and Moss and his colleagues obviously think that the idea of symmetry with the House committee is logical and desirable. A bid to give the committee a lead role in energy matters in the Senate did not succeed, but on 8 April Moss and Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), who is ranking minority member of the committee, declared their intentions, so to speak, by introducing a resolution which would change the name of the committee to the "Committee on Science and Technology."

That both Moss and Goldwater are members of the new select committee is not totally irrelevant in any speculation about the prospects of the space committee for broadening its mandate in science affairs.

The Moss committee already has a toehold in the science policy area. Under the Senate system of multiple referrals the legislation creating the White House science office was considered by the Aeronautical and Space Sciences and Commerce committees as well as by the Labor and Public Welfare Committee in which Kennedy is a subcommittee chairman. Kennedy, however, emerged as *primus inter pares*, heading the Senate conferees who met with House conferees to reconcile differences between House and Senate versions of the bill.

Having three committees from one house of Congress represented on a conference committee will almost inevitably produce strains. But negotiations between the House and Senate went particularly slowly, in part, at least, because the Senate version of the bill contained features proposed by Kennedy which were described as unacceptable to the House conferees—all from the Science and Technology Committee—and to the White House. Justifiably or not, the impasse was ascribed by some to a wish by the Kennedy camp to delay the bill, perhaps even until after the November election to increase the chances for broader final legislation. This resulted in tensions on the Senate side, at least among staff members, which have not yet dissipated.

At this point, of course, discussion over possible realignment of authority over science and energy can be nothing but speculative. It is certainly true that senators complain that they are overcommitted and harassed by the complexity of subjects with which they must deal and the multiplicity of committees which keeps most of them running one-man relay races from meeting to meeting. Yet many are probably unsure that a possible loss of personal power and prestige in a reformed system would be outweighed by gains in general efficiency.

At its first meeting, members of the select committee spoke hopefully of moving ahead and making at least a preliminary report by the end of the year. Even if they manage it, they face an uncertain reception. Not only is there the prospect of a presidential election in November and a new Congress in January, but the leadership of both parties will change with the retirement of Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) and Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.). The attitudes of their replacements are probably of crucial importance to the committee's mission. The way of the reformer is always hard in Congress and currently it seems especially so.—JOHN WALSH

*Other senators on the 12-member committee, which is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans, are Democrats Lee Metcalf, Montana; Gaylord Nelson, Wisconsin; Lloyd Bentsen, Texas; Lawton M. Chiles, Florida; Frank E. Moss, Utah; and Republicans Clifford P. Hansen, Wyoming; Barry Goldwater, Arizona; Bob Packwood, Oregon; Pete V. Domenici, New Mexico; Jesse A. Helms, North Carolina.