21 January 1977, Volume 195, Number 4275 **SCIENCE**

Science in the Ford Years: Last Things

In the short and troubled Ford presidency, one would have expected the affairs of science to take a back seat. The main issues in that harassed interregnum concerned the stumbling national economy, the low estate of government, and general malaise and drift in the country's sense of purpose. If the Ford Administration was to woo any constituency, the scientific community logically would be about the last on the political list.

But politics and the making of public policy are strange and baffling arts. The departing President, a Midwesterner trained for the law and politics, and lacking any visible reason to care about the advancement of science, has turned out to be its good friend. Mr. Ford leaves a considerable legacy in the form of a statutory expression of national policy toward science and technology, the makings of a White House science policy center, and a research and development budget that provides for sensible growth and variety. There is a wryness in the fact that his political exit coincides with America's sweep of Nobel honors.

True, not everything is in order. The state of national affairs in energy decision-making is still dismal, if not disgraceful. The risks of nuclear proliferation seem more real than at any time in the recent past. The defense budget spirals upward while arms control agreements stumble and falter. There is no progress in negotiating the Law of the Sea. Technological innovation in the industrial sector is far from what it could be. Developing countries face frightening contingencies in meeting the needs of their people and dousing the incendiary potential of their rising dissatisfactions.

Even so, it must be said that a battered presidency alone could hardly surround and settle that formidable agenda. Our failures of resolution are the common indictment of all of us, and presidential power cannot be exercised in a vacuum. Neither Mr. Ford's defeat nor Governor Carter's victory was decided on the basis of how these issues entered into the choice. Indeed, the evidence is that politicians run dreadful risks when they stake their political futures on championing scientific freedom and progress rather than on conventional politics. A Daddario in 1970 and a Hechler in 1976 could not win governorship campaigns despite outstanding work for science and technology in Congress. What James Symington got for all his defense of the National Science Foundation in the "MACOS* fracas" was a sound thumping in his home state. In none of these cases was there an observable gathering of the scientific and technical clans on behalf of their embattled defenders. No one should be shocked if, the next time science is ambushed, politicians look the other way.

Americans tend to smirk when the British Honours List appears each year and eclipses briefly the torrent of bad news. But it is a symbol of grace under stress, and it might not do us any great harm to find civilized ways for expressing thanks for substantial public service. It should not be necessary to accumulate a thousand years of history to see that there is no shame in gratitude, and that it need not be pretentious.

There is a stir in the coatrooms of Washington. A government is retiring and a government is entering. The continuity of the political seasons unfolds as it has been ordained, and there is a touch of fever in the anticipation of things to be. But as the Gerald Fords, Guy Stevers, Charles Moshers, and James Symingtons take leave, let them know that their going is noted respectfully and their efforts remembered. If in years to come, science brings something of value to the relief of the human condition, it will not only be because of its own drive, but also because there have been public servants who did not stop to count the votes before putting the advancement of knowledge first.—WILLIAM D. CAREY

*"Man: A Course of Study." See J. Walsh, *Science* **188**, 426 (1975).