
Synfuels Corp. Backs Gas Projects, Loses a President

The Synthetic Fuels Corporation (SFC), which has been hammered by several recent investigations, took another blow on 27 April when its president and board member Victor M. Thompson, Jr., resigned under fire. Thompson joined the board in September 1981. He lasted as president (the second-ranked official after the chairman) only 2 months, having been elected in mid-February 1984. He filled the vacancy left by Victor A. Schroeder.

Schroeder resigned the presidency after a congressional investigation last summer, but remains on the board. Both Schroeder and Thompson are friends and business associates of SFC chairman Edward Noble, who also has been asked to resign by Representative John Dingell (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Before he became the SFC's president, Thompson was president and chief executive officer of the Utica Bankshares Corp. of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The bank ran into financial trouble in 1982 because it had overinvested in vulnerable oil ventures. An SFC internal review in April found that Thompson violated the agency's ethical standards in failing to divulge to the SFC that his handling of Utica stock sales was under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission. In addition, Dingell has objected to the fact that Thompson negotiated the sale of bank stock with someone who at the same time had a synfuels project under review for possible financing by the SFC.

Thompson's departure leaves the SFC without a quorum to make funding decisions. Just the day before Thompson resigned, the SFC board took care of some important pending business: it approved a \$620-million price support agreement with Dow Chemical for a coal gasification project in Louisiana and a \$790-million price support plan for the Great Plains Coal Gasification Project in North Dakota. These decisions may now be called into question by Dingell.

Meanwhile, the White House has announced that the President will nominate Eric Reichl as a replace-

ment for Thompson. Reichl is a pioneer researcher and developer of coal liquefaction technologies, having worked in this field since the 1930's. He studied the German synthetic fuel plants for the Navy in the 1940's and in later years worked on process technologies for several oil companies, most recently for Conoco's coal development division. He is now a private consultant. The Administration is expected to ask the Senate to accelerate his confirmation hearing schedule.—**ELIOT MARSHALL**

Critics Reserve Judgment on China Nuclear Accord

President Reagan's announcement in Peking of a nuclear cooperation agreement with China means that negotiations dating back to 1981 have been successfully concluded. Depending on the terms of the agreement, the Administration could now face arduous negotiations in convincing Congress to accept the deal.

Approval of the agreement would open the way for American companies to compete to build 12 nuclear power plants in China worth some \$20 billion over the next 20 years. Skeptics in Congress have urged the Administration not to accept any deal with China that does not fully meet the requirements of the U.S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (NNPA), which is designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. China until now has declined to sign the international Non-proliferation Treaty or to accept international safeguards on its nuclear facilities.

According to reports from Peking, an impasse in negotiations was broken by China's agreement not to carry out the enrichment or reprocessing of nuclear fuel from U.S.-built reactors or to store nuclear materials capable of use in nuclear weapons without U.S. consent. Press reports, however, quote U.S. officials as acknowledging that the language covering safeguards in the text is "fuzzy."

The agreement was initialed in Peking by American and Chinese officials on 30 April, but will not go into effect until accepted by the U.S. Congress as the NNPA requires. After a formal signing, scheduled to take

place in Washington in about a month, the agreement will be submitted to Congress which then has 60 legislative days to consider it. Sources on Capitol Hill say that the congressional reaction to the agreement cannot be gauged until the details of the agreement are known.—**JOHN WALSH**

NIH Rejects Modified Plan to Clone Shiga Toxin

Richard Krause, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has turned down a recommendation by the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) that would have enabled a controversial experiment to be conducted under standard safety conditions. The experiment, proposed by Alison O'Brien and Randall Holmes of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, involves the cloning of a Shiga-like toxin from *Escherichia coli*.

RAC originally approved the experiment under strict P4 containment. But in February it agreed by a vote of 9 to 5 with 4 abstentions to permit the researchers to drop the containment level to P2. Krause, following established precedent, rejected the recommendation because it did not reflect a clear consensus. The experiment drew protests at the February meeting from critics who claimed the research could have biological warfare implications (*Science*, 24 February, p. 799).

O'Brien and Holmes have recently submitted another proposal, to be considered at the next RAC meeting in June, that the experiments be started in a P4 facility and moved to lower containment if certain conditions are met.—**JEFFREY L. FOX**

KGB Moves in on Departing Refusenik

Three days before his scheduled departure for Israel, Soviet biologist David Goldfarb was raided by the KGB who confiscated his papers and bacteria collection and told him he was being investigated for trying to take national security material out of the country.