

active tracers to elucidate such processes as the utilization of carbon dioxide in the synthesis of proteins. During this period (1950) he received from the Washington Academy of Sciences its annual award in the physical sciences.

In 1953 Abelson was named director of the Carnegie Institution's Geophysical Laboratory, also in Washington, D.C., and he has since been exploring the organic matter in sedimentary rocks and in fossils. He could now be called a paleobiochemist, but "scientist" is better. If one should drop in unannounced to see Dr. Abelson at the Geophysical Laboratory, the chances are that the director would not be found behind a desk; he would be wearing a laboratory coat and talking or working in the laboratory with one of his associates.

Some of Abelson's unofficial activities cannot be explained in terms of his need to know. Much that he does is

purely altruistic—a giving of his time, knowledge, and experience to help others. One must classify as altruistic his service on committees of the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council (Division of Medical Sciences), the National Institutes of Health, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; his service to the AAAS as chairman of its Meetings Committee; and his service to the scientific community of the Washington metropolitan area in 1961 as president of the Washington Academy of Sciences. I shall long remember his leadership in bringing to selected science teachers of this area not only an authoritative short course on atomic radiation but laboratory experience in the detection and measurement of such radiations. Thus he hoped to reach the high school stu-

dents and prepare them, through their teachers, to understand and guard against the perils of our atomic age. Recently he became president of the District of Columbia chapter of the Society of the Sigma Xi. This is neither a conspicuous nor a glamorous office, but a fraction of Abelson's time will be of more value to the society than hours of attention by an ordinary president.

If past performance is any guide, Abelson will make innovations in *Science* though preserving the many fine qualities of the present magazine. He will seek to attain rapid publication of the most important announcements of new research results. As editor, he will find means of utilizing to a greater degree the talents of the scientific community. *Science* will become an even more interesting and useful source of news of broad significance to all its readers.

News and Comment

Atomic Power: House Decides That "Sweetened" Proposal for Using Hanford Steam Is Still Unpalatable

The House last week again indulged itself in the political luxury of dumping some 800,000 kilowatts' worth of steam into the Columbia River. The decision represented a triumph for the coal states and private power interests, and provided a casebook example of the political encumbrances that frequently envelop attempts to adapt new technology to national needs.

At issue was a newly drafted—and politically sweetened—proposal to produce electric power from the tremendous heat that will be available in a new plutonium reactor now under construction at Hanford, Washington. The primary purpose of the reactor is to join eight others now in operation at Hanford in the production of plutonium for weapons' use. The existing reactors were constructed without facilities for using their by-product, heat; when the new reactor was authorized by Congress in 1958, \$25 million was included

to adapt it for the useful production of steam. The project, however, has always been regarded with hostility and suspicion by the coal states and private power interests, which look upon Hanford as a wedge for the Atomic Energy Commission to move into the power business to the detriment of coal and private power.

Last year, an administration proposal to spend \$95 million for power production facilities to use the steam at Hanford was beaten down by the House; the House stuck to its position even after the Senate, in an attempt at a compromise, voted a \$58 million generating facility that would be restricted to providing power for use only at Hanford.

The proposal that came up for consideration in the House last week called for no federal money at all for generating electricity from Hanford. Rather, the proposal sought permission for the AEC to enter into a contract under which the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS), comprising 16 public utility groups in Washington, would build and operate the

generating facilities at its own expense. The steam, which would otherwise be wasted, would be sold to the WPPSS at a price to be approved by the Federal Power Commission, and would be resold for distribution through the Bonneville Power Administration. One-half of the power would be made available to private power firms, without price discrimination, an arrangement that would seem to dull the argument that the Hanford project is a scheme to fatten public power interests at the expense of private utilities and the general taxpayer. Estimates on just what sum the government would receive from the sale of the steam can justifiably be regarded with skepticism—they range up to a total of \$125 million over 24 years—since few atomic power developments conform to expectations; but, in any event, the situation came down to a choice between throwing away the steam or creating the very good possibility that it will bring a considerable amount of money into the U.S. Treasury without any further expense to the government.

In terms of meeting the objections raised in debate last year, the new proposal would seem to have been all that could be desired, for it decisively undercut the principal arguments raised against its predecessor. For guardians of the public treasury, it held out the very good prospect of income from a facility that would otherwise bring the government nothing, and for private utilities it offered one-half of the power

at prices that would put them at no disadvantage. The logic of the case swayed a number of members away from the opposition, notably Representative Craig Hosmer (R-Calif.), who helped lead the fight against Hanford last year. (At that time, he contended that the project was wasteful in any terms, because "If we are at war, Hanford will be one of the prime enemy targets and the \$58 million investment will stand a great chance of being blown to atoms. If we are at peace, it will undoubtedly be because agreements have been made between the United States and the Soviet Union . . . and therefore we will not be producing plutonium at Hanford; and therefore there will be no steam to run this plant; and therefore the \$58 million could not be recovered." This time, Hosmer felt that the new financial arrangements took care of his earlier concerns.)

The debate on the revised proposal quickly made clear, however, that no conceivable arrangement for drawing power out of the Hanford reactor would be to the liking of the coal industry and the representatives who reflected its concerns in the House. The 30-member Pennsylvania delegation, for example, forgot party differences to produce 27 votes against the proposals, two uncast ballots, and only one in favor. Helping lead the Pennsylvanians on the issue was John H. Dent, a Democrat, who candidly stated that "We who want to see our coal and railroad industries revived are not so naive as to believe that Hanford power would not eventually move into markets now served by solid fuel. Thus Hanford would not only deprive coal miners in the State of Washington from the jobs they need; it would also come east and snatch employment opportunities from states east of the Mississippi River."

The opposition also turned to national security as a basis for argument, offering the theory that if the AEC has to pay attention to power production, its attention will be diverted from plutonium production for weapons. When Representative Chet Holifield (D-Calif.), chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, countered that "practically every reactor in the Soviet Union is a dual purpose reactor," John R. Pillion, a New York Republican, replied: "As a matter of fact, when we are dealing with defense capabilities, I do not propose to follow the recommendations of Khrushchev."

The final vote, 232-163, killed the

project by specifically barring the AEC from entering into "any arrangement" for the production of electric power from the new reactor. The Senate may attempt to revive the issue, but any effort at this time is generally considered futile. The House opposition is in a hardened and uncompromising state and, as far as that chamber is concerned, Hanford is not even remotely negotiable.

The House's rejection of the Hanford project illuminates some fundamental features of the political state in which the nation now finds itself. This is largely a state of domestic stalemate in which social and economic innovation under government auspices automatically encounters intense congressional opposition. The framework left by the New Deal has now become a well-accepted part of the American scene, but efforts to go beyond that framework have almost invariably foundered in Congress. This was the case with Kennedy's proposal for a department of urban affairs, the school construction and teachers' salary bills of last year, and the recent defeat of medical care for the aged financed through social security.

Inside the mass of opposition to the Hanford project there was unquestionably a nugget of rational economic argument. No matter what the proponents claimed for Hanford, the project would not do any good for the small and slowly developing coal industry in the Northwest. On the other hand, 800,000 kilowatts in that booming region would scarcely constitute the death blow that was predicted by the area's coal producers; nor would it have had any effect on Pennsylvania coal, which, because of shipping costs, has no market in the Northwest. Pillion, in summoning his conservative colleagues to arms, characterized the project as "the greatest giveaway of this century," but it is doubtful that he took himself seriously and almost certain that no one else did.

The opposition to Hanford, nevertheless, had no difficulty in drawing bipartisan support from every section of the country, with the understandable exception of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The delegations from these states, totaling seven Republicans and six Democrats, went down the line for Hanford. The project also had the endorsement of Mark Hatfield, the Republican governor of Oregon, but the Republicans in the House voted 132-29 against it, while 100 Demo-

crats, 62 of them from the South, were also in the opposition.

Diverse motivations existed in the opposition, but among the dominant strains was conservative aversion to what after all amounted to further government involvement in the power business. The involvement was surely of the most distant nature that legal skill could devise; furthermore, there is no rebuttal to the argument that the steam is going to be there whether or not it produces electricity, but once AEC-produced steam starts turning out electricity—regardless of the financial arrangements—the precedent is established for the AEC to serve as a large-scale source of energy. The precedent could conceivably have no progeny, but once established, it would put the government into an area from which it is now excluded. The present political makeup of the House has no appetite for such precedents.

—D. S. GREENBERG

NIH Administration: Congress Told It Will Tighten Up

Surgeon General Luther L. Terry has assured Congress that new steps are being studied to tighten supervision over the National Institutes of Health extramural programs.

The steps under consideration were reported last week to Representative L. H. Fountain (D-N.C.), whose Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee last month accused NIH of "loose administrative practices." NIH in hearings held by Fountain argued that medical research cannot be run like a profit-making business, and that its best hope for getting good value for its money lay in picking good men and good projects and leaving them pretty much alone. Fountain and his colleagues showed no interest in this concept of how to account for the government's money, and demanded that NIH revise its administrative procedures. The committee would be hard put to compel this directly, but NIH, with its long history of warm congressional relations, is not looking to incur the displeasure of influential members of Congress.

The steps under study include placing greater responsibility on grantee institutions for administrative supervision of extramural research. "The nature and extent of the responsibility remanded to the institution remain to be worked out," the PHS reported. It added that "It might be advisable, for example, to give such institutions au-