Route to the Top: Government to Campus

University faculties have long served as a pool of manpower for the upper reaches of the federal bureaucracy. They still do, but of late, a new pattern has begun to emerge in the manpower flow: increasingly, universities are reaching into the federal service to fill their senior administrative posts. One reason is that Washington has lured or revealed some exceptional talents, and the academic world wants them for its own. But not to be discounted is the fact that, since federal money has become a mainstay of higher education, familiarity with the intricacies of the Washington scene is a valuable commodity in academic executive suites.

Last year, Bowen Dees, the number 3 man in the National Science Foundation, became vice president of the University of Arizona, after having served with NSF from its founding day in 1951. Lincoln Gordon, who left a Harvard professorship in 1961 to become ambassador to Brazil and later Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, is to become president of Johns Hopkins University. J. Herbert Hollomon, who came out of industry to become Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology, has been named president of the University of Oklahoma.

The latest move from government to high academic position is that of David Z. Robinson, who will be leaving the staff of the Office of Science and Technology in July to become vice president for academic affairs at New York University, which can match any place for ambitious designs in growth and excellence. As an OST staff member, Robinson, a 39-year-old Harvard Ph.D. in chemical physics, has been properly anonymous in comparison with some of his predecessors on the government-to-university route. But as an OST specialist on basic research, high-energy physics, computers, and administration of federal research grants, he is well known and highly respected in government and in the scientific community. Donald F. Hornig, the presidential science adviser, is said to be extremely unhappy about Robinson's impending departure, but after nearly 6 years' service on the White House science staff, and many offers, Robinson felt that the N.Y.U. offer was too good to pass up.

According to an announcement from N.Y.U., Robinson will be involved "in planning and administering the University's instructional, research, and public service programs." Prior to his Washington service, Robinson was assistant director of research for Baird Associates (now Baird-Atomic) and served as a scientific liaison officer in the London branch of the Office of Naval Research. At OST, Robinson's salary was $25,800. At N.Y.U. it will be "substantially higher." His return to the campus, it should be pointed out, is partially the result of the traditional flow from the university to government. The post he will fill represents a consolidation of the office of vice president for scientific affairs, which Werner Baum filled until becoming deputy administrator of the Environmental Science Services Administration last January, and the office of assistant executive vice president, which Frederick H. Jackson will leave in July to become president of Clark University.

Meanwhile, academic recruiters continue to set their lures for veterans of the Washington scene. These operations are, of course, conducted with great discretion, and just who has been wooing whom is rarely revealed until a match is made. But it is no secret that two highly placed figures have been attracting a swarm of offers. These are Hornig and John Wilson, deputy director of NSF. Hornig is more or less committed to remain in his post at least until after the election, while Wilson, whose career, with one brief exception, has been entirely in government, seems quite happy where he is. But academic recruiters are an enterprising and determined lot, and one of the rules of academic courting is that "No" is an extremely encouraging sign. Robinson himself points out that he had intended to stick with OST at least until election time, and that his first response to the N.Y.U. offer was firmly in the negative.—D. S. GREENBERG

technology. Oyster Creek, they say, was a "loss leader" and GE gambled on later sales and the use of standardized design ("replication") to turn the loss into a profit.

Perhaps most important, it should be remembered that the next major step ahead, technologically, should be the appearance of the fast-breeder reactor, which produces more plutonium from uranium than it consumes. The British have a prototype fast reactor scheduled to start operating in 1970–71, ahead of everyone else except possibly the Russians. Things then may look different and more favorable for the British.

When all this is conceded, the effect of Burn's discussion is to leave doubts as to whether the British have the knack of managing to the point of commercial payoff a massive research and development program in a high-technology area such as nuclear power.

This is a question that looms over current attempts to reorganize the British nuclear energy industry. The AEA view is that technological progress has overtaken planning, and that an overhaul of the machinery is in order. The discussion seems to focus on two recommendations: (i) that the number of consortia be reduced further, from three to two, and (ii) that responsibility for reactor design, now split between the AEA, CEGB, and the consortia, be concentrated in the AEA. To Burn and people who agree with him, this seems like proposing that the ills of centralization be cured with more centralization.

What is new in the present situation is that a Minister of Technology with broader responsibilities and readier access to advice than his predecessors will be charged with making the key decision on the reforms. The Minister, Anthony Wedgewood Benn, in February appeared to be disposed to follow AEA advice, but now the word is that he is keeping an open mind. The views of the Parliamentary select committee on science and technology will also count if the committee is able to master its subject in a reasonable time. While it is too early to tell whether it will ever rival the forcefulness and verve of the Congressional Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, the Commons committee has already accomplished something by providing a forum for a more open public discussion of the complicated questions involved than has ever before preceded a major decision on nuclear power policy in Britain.—JOHN WALSH