

Some NIH, NIMH Scientists Lobby To End the War

In the wake of the Nixon administration's abrupt and surprising action in Cambodia, a remarkable new restiveness and outspokenness has developed on the part of some federal officials and employees, including some scientists in the campus-like environs of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

First, there was Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel's letter to Nixon on the administration's alienation of the young. Though ostensibly a private letter to the President, it was leaked so promptly to the press that it is understandable if Nixon and his White House aides suspect that their faithful Wally had in mind an open letter all along. The next thing to come to light was the protest by a number of Foreign Service officers against administration policy-making for Southeast Asia. Then, 2 weeks ago, U.S. Commissioner of Education James E. Allen, Jr., told an assembly of Office of Education employees that he could not understand the administration's Vietnam policy and that the effect of the war on young people was "disastrous." The day after he spoke, a few OE employees got nearly 500 of their colleagues to sign a petition endorsing his remarks.

Now, a group of scientists at NIH and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) not only is denouncing the Vietnam War but is actively engaged in congressional lobbying against it. The action of these scientists represents a departure that is worth examining. The group in question is the Assembly of Scientists for NIMH and for two units of NIH, the National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Stroke (NINDS), and the National Eye Institute (NEI). There are four other scientific assemblies at NIH, such as those for the heart and cancer institutes, but none of these has yet taken a position on the war. According to one of its officers, the Assembly of Scientists has been a "fairly somnolent" organization since its founding in the late 1950's. And, by custom, the assembly has confined its interest to matters of direct scientific and professional concern. However, on Monday, 11 May, after the demonstration by war protestors on the Washington Ellipse the previous Saturday, the assembly decided to poll its members on whether it should take stands on national issues of "overriding critical concern" such as the war issue.

Lesson of the "Good Germans"

Eberhard Trams, German-born chief of the section on physiology and metabolism at NINDS's neurochemistry laboratory, was among those who had said that the assembly should take positions on such issues. Trams recalled that, after World War II, there was much criticism by American scholars of German scientists and academicians for having kept their silence as "good Germans" during and after Hitler's rise to power. Others who took the view that the Assembly of Scientists had an *obligation* to take a public position on the war issue included members such as Allen T. Dittmann, president of the group and a psychologist at the NIMH psychology laboratory; Melvin Kohn, a sociologist and chief of the NIMH socio-

environmental studies laboratory; and Wade H. Marshall, chief of the NIMH neurophysiology laboratory (who made his own ironic comment by wearing a hard hat at a recent assembly meeting).

Included in the questionnaire distributed to assembly members were questions about the Cambodia invasion and whether the Hatfield-McGovern Amendment to force a U.S. military withdrawal from Indochina should be supported. An individual becomes a member of the assembly simply by being a scientist at one of the three institutes, and nobody knows how many members there are, though the best reckoning is that there are probably not more than about 350 scientists now at the institutes. Of the 400 questionnaires sent out, more than 200 were returned. All but about 25 of the respondents wanted the assembly to speak out on the war and on other critical issues. On the question of the Hatfield-McGovern Amendment, 173 of the respondents were for the amendment, 24 were against it. Nearly as large a majority (166 to 24) was opposed to the decision to invade Cambodia.

Symbolic Gesture on Capitol Hill

The assembly met again on 20 May and decided not only to announce publicly the results of the poll but to lobby for Hatfield-McGovern. In a symbolic gesture one afternoon last week, a delegation of about 50 assembly members went by chartered bus to Capitol Hill as petitioners. Senator Charles McC. Mathias, Jr., of Maryland, a Republican dove, received them sympathetically, though he would not agree to cosponsor the Hatfield-McGovern Amendment at this time. The next step is for teams of eight to ten assembly members to call on other senators and representatives.

No official of NIH, NIMH, or the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has as yet protested the assembly's taking a position on the war. However, this reporter talked with several members of the Assembly of Scientists who, though reluctant to be quoted by name, felt that the scientists should speak out on the war issue as individuals and not in the name of the assembly. All happened to be scientists who still support the President's Vietnam policy. "The assembly dilutes its authority on scientific matters by taking positions on political issues," said one of them.

The Assembly of Scientists is also circulating a petition within NIH-NIMH "deplor[ing] the censure" by the Department of State of the Foreign Service officers who had protested the administration's Cambodia action and "strongly support[ing] the right of any federal employe to dissent publicly from government policy." The assembly wants to make common cause on the war issue with dissenters throughout the bureaucracy.

Of course, dissent by federal employees from administration policy well may continue to be regarded as surprising departures from the bureaucratic norm. To make free dissent the norm, the conventional wisdom would first have to be turned on its head, and this is a feat that could be tricky and even hazardous.—LUTHER J. CARTER