

O'Connor, a virologist by training, who is respected as one of the most scientifically sophisticated administrators in the institute. O'Connor, visibly enthusiastic about his program, is particularly anxious that it foster interdisciplinary research. The advisory committee includes a couple other NCI staff members and several university scientists. Their job is to define the goals of the molecular control program, take a hand in implementing them, and to offer an opinion on whether specific contracts (or possibly grants) should be

approved. Such recommendations then go to the NCI brass for final action.

From the outset, it was apparent that some of the university scientists did not fully understand how the NCI operates; nor did they fully agree with some of the premises of the NCI program once they got them straight.

When the meeting opened, O'Connor informed the group of four contracts that had won final clearance. The conversation quickly turned to policy when Christian B. Anfinsen, who shared the 1973 Nobel prize in chemistry, asked

about how contracts originate. Do they just come from the "stratosphere" for approval, or can the committee initiate things, he queried.

O'Connor said that the ideas for contracts are often generated by investigators themselves at the annual NCI meeting for contractors. Saul Schepartz added to the answer, saying, "Every once in a while you might get a really good proposal that is unsolicited [by NCI], but then you have to ask whether it fits our program." Anfinsen found the answer "disappointing."

Briefing

Two Academies at Parting of Ways?

The strained relationship between the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) is apparently at the breaking point. At its 16 March meeting the NAE's governing council reportedly decided that differences between the two academies could not be reconciled and separation was in order. Unless a last minute reversal occurs, the matter is expected to be put to the membership of NAE at the organization's annual meeting in early May.

Neither NAS president Philip B. Handler nor NAE president Clarence H. Linder would comment on the current state of negotiations. On 12 March, however, the NAS announced the first major steps toward reorganization of the National Research Council (NRC), the operating arm through which the two academies provide advice to government. The action was taken unilaterally by NAS and this was taken as at least an indirect sign that the NAS-NAE talks were foundering.

The long-running negotiations between the two academies had focused on governance. The NAE, which was created in 1964 under the NAS charter as a "parallel" organization, has felt that it has never achieved parity. Control of the National Research Council has been regarded by the NAE as a main issue in the dispute.

NAS officials note that the NRC reorganization was designed "in the hope" that the reshaped NRC could eventually be guided by a joint gov-

erning board of the two academies but the hope now seems very slim.

The aim of the announced reorganization of NRC is to replace the NRC's traditional divisions, organized along disciplinary lines, with a structure better suited to dealing with problems that require multidisciplinary action. The reorganization will begin with the establishment of an Assembly of Behavioral and Social Sciences and a Commission on Natural Resources. The new assembly and commission are prototypes of the main components of the new structure given general approval at the NAS meeting last year.

In effect, the activities of the NRC's existing divisions will be distributed between assemblies and commissions which will also take on additional functions. According to a description issued by the NAS:

"The principal concerns of each Assembly will be the welfare of its component disciplines and their contribution to national life; the Assemblies will also serve as sources of both manpower and ideas for the Commissions. Additional Assemblies in the Life Sciences and in the Physical Sciences and Mathematics will deal with programs and studies within those scholarly fields. The Executive Committee of each Assembly will be drawn largely from among the membership of the Academy.

"Activities in broad national problem areas—which by their nature will involve disciplines in both the natural and social sciences, as well as engineering—will be the concern of the Commissions. Those yet to be established will deal with human resources, peace and national security, international scientific affairs, and technologies in large, com-

plex social systems—for example, in the areas of transportation, communication, and urban development. The membership of each Commission, then, will be multidisciplinary in character and again will be drawn largely from the membership of NAS and NRC."

Academy officials expect the basic reorganization to be completed by the end of the year.

A lot of details remain to be worked out. The assemblies are not only expected to provide the commissions with names of members, but also to review reports of projects. Assemblies will not be tied to particular commissions, and the commissions are not subordinate to the assemblies. Most of the contract work now done by the divisions will be taken on by the commissions, but assemblies will also take on projects which fall within their disciplinary boundaries and interests. The commissions will be expected to go considerably further than did the divisions in planning their own programs and in undertaking projects they feel they ought to do as well as those they are requested to do.

In designating the first assembly and commission, the academy seems to have picked two of the more manageable and logical components. The new assembly closely matches the Behavioral Sciences Division it supplants, and the Commission on Natural Resources comfortably accommodates NRC's work on the environment. Other decisions on fitting functions into new forms are expected to be a lot more difficult.

As for the NAS-NAE relationship, if the divorce goes through, there is little uncertainty about who gets custody of NRC.—J.W.