

GENERAL SCIENCE

Battery Additive Hearings

Senate Small Business Committee suspends its hearings on the controversial battery additive, and sends letter to Post Office asking why fraud order was issued.

► **WHEN IS a test not a test?** When is a hearing not a hearing? These are questions raised by the latest charges and sparks in the battery additive controversy.

The Senate Small Business Committee has suspended (June 26) its hearings after the manufacturer of the battery additive, the director of the National Bureau of Standards that declared the material worthless, the M.I.T. tester, and various testimonial-offering users had testified.

Unheard is a long list of announced witnesses, including Post Office, Federal Trade Commission and Better Business Bureau representatives, consumer testing authorities, battery experts, etc.

The committee chairman, Sen. Edward J. Thye (R.-Minn.), said (July 1) that he believed personally the suspended Post Office fraud order should be revoked, and his letter on behalf of the committee asked Postmaster General Arthur C. Summerfield why the fraud order had been issued against the battery additive. The committee drew no conclusions from its suspended hearings.

Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D.-Minn.), also a member of the committee, charged that the investigation might lead to "continuous pressure by private groups to bypass the Bureau of Standards."

Like some of the tests of battery additives, when the treatment is given to all batteries observed, there is lacking in the hearings the comparative information that results from what a scientist knows as a "controlled test."

The hearings were stopped before both sides of the controversy could be heard adequately, and before there was opportunity for examination of testimony as would occur in a court.

Not resolved in the hearings was the idea of a valid scientific or technical test. If a single or a number of batteries are treated with a substance, no valid conclusion can be drawn as to the effect of the substance. There must be a comparison with just the same kind and condition of battery or batteries, left untreated. Even so, there must be an adequate number of batteries tested and the way they act must be quantitatively measured.

Thus the battery mechanic who puts something in a battery and does not do a comparative test, or a "control" test, can be enthusiastic about the way his battery operates, and yet it will actually mean nothing with regard to the value of the material added.

This is why scientists insist upon controls for their tests and the tests of others. A basic principle of science and engineering is

that the same material under the same conditions will act the same.

A senator could be assured by a scientist that magnesium sulfate will act the same way a year or a decade from now as it has in the past. There is no basis for hoping and wishing that magnesium sulfate can be mysteriously improved to pep up batteries in some future tests. Not even an Act of Congress could change the properties of magnesium sulfate.

If there have been properly designed and conducted tests, such as those of the Bureau of Standards, there is no purpose in repeated tests in the hope that a result will finally be obtained that will be to the liking of some manufacturer who desires to sell his product.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1953

MEDICINE

Polio Chances One in 156 During First 20 Years

► **THE CHANCES** of a child dying of poliomyelitis before he reaches the age of 21 are one in 1,945. The chances of his getting polio during the first 20 years of his life are one in 156.

These "guestimates" are given by Dr. Henry W. Kumm of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, New York. They come from analysis of birth data and polio incidence in four states, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and North Carolina. The figures pertain to more than 600,000 children born in these states in 1930, 1931 or 1932.

Dr. Kumm's figures are announced in a new medical publication, *Pediatric Clinics of North America* (see p. 12), being distributed to the nation's physicians by W. B. Saunders Company, medical book publishers of Philadelphia.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1953

NUTRITION

World Food Ahead In Population Race

► **WORLD FOOD** production has pulled ahead of the number of hungry mouths in the race between food supply and increasing population.

The World Food Council of the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization meeting in Rome reported that for the last three years food production has increased about 2% annually while population has risen only 1.4% each year. These figures do not include either the U.S.S.R. or China.

Agricultural production now stands 20% higher than the prewar level, FAO said. While sharp rises in cereal production account for much of the increase, gains have been made in most principal crops.

This picture of increasing food supply, however, is not uniformly true over the world. For instance, agricultural production during the last three years has increased 12% in Europe, 7% in Latin America, and 16% in the Near East. But the Far East and North America have only increased agricultural production 4% to 5% in the last three years.

The Far East is still a long way from growing enough food for its snow-balling population. In spite of recent increases, agricultural production is still only 80% to 85% the prewar level.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1953

NECROLOGY

A. C. Monahan, Aviation Editor and Educator, Dies

► **ARTHUR COLEMAN** Monahan, 76, SCIENCE SERVICE staff writer for ten years, died July 2 after a long illness.

Mr. Monahan joined SCIENCE SERVICE's editorial staff after retiring as Assistant to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

He wrote in the fields of aviation, engineering, technology, mining, mechanics and electronics. For three years he did the weekly feature on new patents.

Born in Framingham, Mass., one of 13 children, Mr. Monahan received his bachelor of science degree from the Massachusetts Agricultural College, now known as the University of Massachusetts.

He was on the staff of the U. S. Office of Education from 1910 to 1918. Mr. Monahan served as a major in the Army during World War I.

Following the war, he worked as director of the Bureau of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Council, and later was an educational consultant for the Central Scientific Co., Chicago, and for the Kewaunee Manufacturing Co., Adrian, Mich.

Surviving are his wife, Mary C. Monahan, four children, a brother and a sister, four grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1953

TECHNOLOGY

New Hypo Syringe Has Interchangeable Parts

► **HOSPITAL NURSES'** laborious task of matching code numbers on hundreds of jumbled syringe parts can now be eliminated.

Development of a new interchangeable hypodermic syringe called "Multifit" has been announced by Becton-Dickinson and Company, Rutherford, N. J. Every plunger now fits every barrel.

The cost of replacing broken parts is materially reduced, because all plungers fit all barrels.

Science News Letter, July 11, 1953