

The changing of the guard

It was more than a year ago that the appointment of Dr. Franklin Long to the directorship of the National Science Foundation was scrubbed at the eleventh hour when White House insiders discovered his opposition to the antiballistic missile system (SN: 5/10/69, p. 450).

Pressured by the scientific community, which was aghast at this intrusion of politics into science, President Nixon astounded and pleased the nation's scientists with a frank apology and reoffered the job to Dr. Long. Fearing that the tarnish of the political fray might restrict his effectiveness, however, Dr. Long bowed out and the position went to a biologist from Johns Hopkins, Dr. Willam McElroy, who has deftly steered clear of political entanglements.

In another more recent incident, Dr. George S. Hammond of the California Institute of Technology was slated to be named deputy director of NSF, until he spoke out publicly against the United States' invasion of Cambodia. "I believe that he (President Nixon) was sincere when he said that the decision might blow the national election. I hope it does," Dr. Hammond said in a speech. Presidential science adviser Dr. Lee A. DuBridge and Dr. McElroy persuaded Dr. Hammond to withdraw his name from consideration. Said Dr. DuBridge: "When you declare political warfare on the President, it gets a little awkward."

There have been other incidents, equally political and equally public. And the view has taken root in the scientific community that President Nixon is playing politics with science to an extent his predecessors did not.

Some politics is evident in the appointments. But there is some question whether the situation is actually unprecedented or is being made to seem so by the heat politics is generating, even among scientists, these days.

Dr. Donald F. Hornig, science adviser to President Lyndon Johnson, says incidents like the Long and Hammond affairs were rare during the Johnson Administration. But he concedes that political considerations were indeed taken into account, though perhaps more quietly, on both sides. "We certainly did not run political checks on persons nominated for positions at NSF or for Presidential advisory committees," he says, "but at the same time, no one would have thought of submitting the name of an individual who outspokenly opposed the President."

Today, while conceding sensitivity about appointing the Administration's



NIH

Yolles: Pushed, jumped or fell.



Finch: Moving to the White House.

critics to the President's Science Advisory Committee, the White House's Office of Science and Technology, which Dr. DuBridge heads, denies that only registered Republicans are eligible. The five men most recently named to PSAC are a mix of independents, Republicans and quiet Democrats.

And there are two sides as well to some other apparently political firings and defections. When Dr. Joseph English, for instance, was recently forced out of his job as head of the Health Services and Mental Health Administration, an HEW division encompassing the National Institute of Mental Health, his defenders charged that his Democratic affiliation did him in.

Frederic V. Malek, Deputy Under Secretary of HEW, says there was more involved: Dr. English had hastily been given civil service tenure just 10 days before President Nixon's inauguration, says Malek, in a Democratic effort to keep him on the job.

The pot continued to boil after Dr. English's departure, when Dr. Stanley Yolles, director of NIMH, submitted his resignation last week in a letter to Dr. Roger O. Egeberg, Assistant Secretary

for Health and Scientific Affairs. Dr. Yolles charged the Administration with neglect of mental health problems, the substitution of rhetoric for funds in dealing with the drug issue and with introducing partisan politics into the appointment of men to scientific, non-political jobs, his own included. HEW Secretary Robert Finch, who himself was moved last week from HEW to the President's private staff, declared that Dr. Yolles did not quit but was fired for failure to participate or communicate with others in the department.

Dr. Yolles will be replaced by Dr. Bertram Brown, a Democrat who was formerly deputy director of NIMH. Dr. Brown's appointment was engineered by Dr. Vernon Wilson of the University of Missouri, who will take Dr. English's job.

To further compound the apparent politicalization of science appointments, on March 18, Thomas Kelly, described as an HEW intern, sent a letter of recruitment to a score of university deans asking for nominations for the position of director of health evaluation. Candidates, he wrote, "must display a willingness to work with and for the incumbent Administration, which would best be indicated by Republican registration or, at the least, by the absence of opposition registration."

Deputy Under Secretary Malek denies that party affiliation is a prerequisite for employment, except for predefined political jobs, and says "Kelly simply made a mistake." A letter of apology and correction was subsequently sent out, but critics suggest that Kelly's only mistake was putting an established policy into black and white.

While acknowledging that some political consideration figures in the appointment of men to policy-making positions, Malek categorically declares that politics play no role in naming individuals to purely scientific posts, such as the nonpolicy-making jobs at the National Institutes of Health. Of the 121 names the NIH has submitted in the last year for middle-level vacancies, such as laboratory chiefs within individual institutes, all have been approved. Referring to the placement of scientists on NIH study sections, the units that pass on the scientific merit of grant requests, he shares Dr. Hornig's view that playing politics here would be "sheer idiocy."

At present, there is little evidence that political checks are being made of study section candidates, though some NIH officials warn that the situation is not quite that clear. Says one, "After we choose a man for a study section, we send his papers downtown to the Department. They're going down but they are not coming back with the stamp of approval." □