

Secrecy in scientific advising

Large numbers of scientists and engineers provide advice to Government agencies on technical matters. Sometimes what they tell the Government is made public, sometimes it is not.

A Stanford University group has concluded a year-long inquiry into this situation with a condemnation of excessive secrecy surrounding scientific advising to the Government. This secrecy, it finds, stifles public debate of technological issues, enhances the power of the executive branch at the expense of Congress and may actually diminish the impact of informed scientific judgment on scientific decision making.

The study is the work of 20 students and professors in a Stanford Workshop on Social and Political Issues (SWOPSI). Principal authors were Dr. Frank von Hippel, now at Argonne National Laboratory, and Joel Pri-mack, now a junior fellow at Harvard.

They cite seven case histories. One, for example, was a failure of the Atomic Energy Commission's Committee on Reactor Safeguards to go to the public when the AEC licensed a reactor the committee knew might cause many deaths and injuries. Another was when the laboratory whose tests established the teratogenic effect of the herbicide 2,4,5-T complied with a request not to make public its results while the United States continued its use in Vietnam and on its own food supply.

The Stanford report urges advisers to consent no longer to excessive secrecy. It offers five ethical guidelines. The main one: "The adviser's primary responsibility is not to the person or agency he advises, but rather to the nation as a whole." When an adviser feels suppressed information is hampering public debate or being misrepresented he has the responsibility to speak out in public.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Davis succeeds Daddario

As the 92nd Congress gets under way, the Subcommittee on Science, Research and Development of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics has a new chairman, Rep. John W. Davis (D-Ga.). He succeeds Emilio Q. Daddario, who left Congress to run unsuccessfully as Democratic candidate for governor of Connecticut.

Under Daddario, the subcommittee became known over the years as a good friend of basic science. What it lacked in influence, it at least tried to make up for with sympathy. Davis, a member of the subcommittee since 1963, favors a strong scientific effort and in general views the science policy scene in much the same way as Daddario. He favors a greatly expanded National Science Foundation, for instance.

Among the subcommittee's projects in the new session will be hearings to review the structure and function of the National Bureau of Standards and to examine the relationship of science and technology to national and international economy. It will continue to work for the establishment of a National Institute of Research and Advanced Studies (SN: 11/17, p. 365), and of an Office of Technology Assessment to aid Congress (SN: 3/7, p. 240).

PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Technology and society

The average person has extremely mixed feelings about the impact of technology on his life, according to the pilot public opinion survey of 200 Boston area residents by the Harvard University Program on Technology and Society.

Almost all (94 percent) agree that "machines have made life easier," but three-quarters also believe that "people are too dependent on machines." Most (76 percent) believe that, over-all, technology does more good than harm, but 73 percent agree that technology tends to reduce individuals to a set of punched holes in a computer card. As for specific technologies, the man-on-the-street thinks television, computers and automation are good for him, but he is doubtful about the benefits of the space program. Only 39 percent of the sample thought the space program would benefit the average person. Sixty-two percent thought there was such a thing as a "military-industrial complex."

Respondents indicating the most alienation from technology tended to be among the less well informed.

MANSFIELD AMENDMENT

Defense-research curbs eased

The restrictions on Defense-supported research in the 1970 military procurement act were severely watered down in the 1971 bill, now public law. The fiscal 1970 Mansfield amendment limited Defense funds to research projects that have a direct relationship to a specific military function. The 1971 version replaces "direct" with "potential" and leaves the decision up to "the opinion of the Secretary of Defense."

"The modified language," said Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) in debate, "is worse than would be the elimination of the amendment totally." Mansfield was the chief proponent of curbs on Defense supported research.

A later attempt to have the original amendment inserted into the 1971 military appropriations—as distinguished from authorization—bill, an action approved overwhelmingly by the Senate, was defeated in conference committee. The committee omitted the language entirely.

FEDERAL SUPPORT

University-AEC agreements

The faculty of the University of California has voted to recommend broad changes in the university's contracts with the Atomic Energy Commission. The university operates the AEC's Lawrence Radiation Laboratory at Livermore, Calif., and the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory in New Mexico. About \$224.5 million is channeled through the university annually to pay for the laboratories' operations.

The faculty voted 2,278 to 1,712 for the university to continue to operate the laboratories but voted 2,810 to 984 to revise the contracts to make the laboratories more responsive to university faculty and administrators, to reduce secrecy and to change procedures for selecting laboratory directors. The university regents will be presented the recommendations at their next meeting.