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**COVER:** The past decade has brought an enormous advance in knowledge of the sun. Difficult problems remain unsolved, however. See p. 60. (Photo: Computerized color display of data from OSO 7 satellite showing temperature variations in solar corona. Black and turquoise represent cooler regions, bright colors the hottest. NASA)

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## COMMENT

### Restructuring science at the top

The new year is off to a gloomy start for the scientific community in the United States. President Nixon's science adviser has resigned (SN: 1/13/73, p. 20), the White House Office of Science and Technology and the President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC) are to be abolished (see next page), and all signs are that next week's budget message similarly will contain little cheerful news for the scientific community. Furthermore, many as-yet-unannounced impoundments of already budgeted funds are going to have drastic effects on science.

The dismantling of OST and PSAC and the designation of the National Science Foundation as monitor of the nation's civilian scientific and technological progress represent the most fundamental restructuring of the nation's science-policy apparatus since the Eisenhower Administration. Although some changes in executive branch structure for handling science had been expected for the past few weeks, the actions as taken are nevertheless a shock to the scientific community. They seem clearly to represent a demotion of science. They raise dozens of questions. They are a source of concern and bewilderment to many scientists and other persons who favor a strong voice for science and technology in Government.

It is both ironic and instructive to note that despite a series of studies of science policy by advisory groups and Congressional committees in recent years (most of which recommended a strengthened OST), the first real change not only disregards much of what these studies offered but also is accomplished in private by swift executive fiat without benefit of public deliberations.

For what consolation it is worth, science is not alone suffering such a fate. Many other worthy endeavors are being underfunded and reexamined as a result of the President's determination to get a tighter hold over the agencies, reduce the size of their staffs, and hold Government spending to 250 billion. The elimination of PSAC and of OST are partly one of many consequences of Nixon's announced goal to reduce the size of the staffs of the Executive Office of the President by 50 percent.

How much of the changing situation of science is due to these general problems of managing the Government and how much is due to any particular White House indifference or hostility toward science is difficult to measure. There has never been a good feeling of rapport between President Nixon and scientists generally. A practical man, Nixon has never shown much interest in research not tied to identifiable goals nor in the persons who devote their lives purely to intellectual inquiry.

At any rate, whether primarily a managerial and budgetary imperative or the signal of a newly lowered priority of science within Government, the elimination of PSAC, OST and an in-house science adviser is a blow to science. PSAC, OST, and the position of Presidential science adviser have been symbols of the prestige of science at the highest levels of Government. Moreover, they have been mechanisms, admittedly imperfect, for providing high-caliber scientific advice and input to policy decisions on a broad range of important national problems.

There are many questions about how well NSF will be able to carry out its broadened responsibilities. All of us will watch developments of the coming months with great interest and concern.

*Kendrick Frazier*

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