

# Price: an Effect, Not a Cause

by Frank Sartwell

Science, like Humpty-Dumpty, needs putting together again—not because it had a great fall, but because it rose so high so quickly.

To see the totality of science—and particularly its relationship with human affairs in general—is the aim of the new president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Don K. Price Jr. Price, Dean of Harvards Graduates School of Public Administration, took office at the annual meeting of the association.

No great changes in the AAAS are contemplated: “We’ll keep the same general policies,” he said as he dodged automobiles on Washington’s Connecticut Avenue on the way to lunch during the session. “The Triple-A Ess is a 40-ring circus, and the job of the president is simply to give everybody else a chance. The member bodies have free play.”

President Price did point out the association’s move toward more emphasis on man and his environment, and on increasing the public’s understanding of science, trends that have been visible for some time. “I’m an effect,” he smiled, “not a cause.”

Lean, quick of mind and speech, his fingers constantly in motion, Price delivers ideas more quickly than a reporter can write them down. His position as a social scientist heading an organization composed primarily of “hard” scientists doesn’t bother him at all. He is the second social scientist to hold the job in the last 25 years.

Price’s background is not the laboratory but the government office; less among the retorts than among the reports. But he has influenced American science and the directions it is taking more than he willingly admits.

He may also be the only man to choose government work over newspapering on the grounds that it would be more fun.

Born in Middlesboro, Ky., he was graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1931 and immediately faced a serious choice. Through school he had worked for the Nashville Evening Tennessean, and by graduation was state editor. The Rhodes Scholarship he was offered, however, paid twice as much, so the choice wasn’t too difficult.

From Oxford, he received a B.A. in 1934, and a B. Litt. in 1935. Returning to America, he looked around for a newspaper job, without finding what

he wanted. Since he had written a thesis comparing the British and American civil services, he also looked into the government—and accepted a job as a research assistant in the Home Owners Loan Corp. and as assistant to the chairman of the Central Housing Committee. Soon after, the reporting job he was after opened to him—with the United Press in New York—but by then he was enjoying government service so much he turned it down.

Two years with the Central Housing Committee led to two years with the Committee on Public Administration of the Social Science Research Council in New York. Price then moved to the Public Administration Clearing House in Chicago as editorial associate and later, assistant director.

World War II found him back in Washington in a Coast Guard uniform—and promptly borrowed from that service by the Budget Bureau, which was wrestling with the critical legislation setting up the National Science Foundation. “Just junior staff work,” Price mutters today.

Not everyone agrees. “In the formation of the legislation, and particularly in the evolution of the philosophy which was to set the mold for the character of the foundation itself, Don Price played an influential part,” Dr. Caryl P. Haskins, president of the Carnegie Institute, has written.

Other legislation that bears the marks of the new president’s hand includes the act setting up the Atomic Energy Commission (“I was only one of the staff,” he demurs.) He also was brought into the committee, under H. Rowan Gaither, that designed the Ford Foundation.

Price has served as assistant to former President Herbert Hoover on a study of the Presidency, and under President Eisenhower on the Advisory Committee on Government Organization.

In 1953, as associate director of the Clearing House, he also worked in Washington as deputy chairman of the Research and Development Board of the Defense Department. Then he joined the Ford Foundation as an associate director, and soon became a vice president. In 1958 he became (and remains) professor of government and dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Public Administration.

His Seminar in Science and Public

Policy became both famous and imitated and his two books, “Government and Science” (1954) and “The Scientific Estate” (1965) are landmark volumes in the field.

In the latter, Price declared: “Obviously, the argument runs, scientists should work in a democratic way toward democratic goals and politicians should be guided by the methods of science. It seems to me, on the contrary, that we will do more to protect the freedom of our constitutional system by recognizing how fundamentally different politics and science are, and must remain; each is concerned primarily with one of the two complementary aspects of freedom—free will and truth.”

On the whole, the relationship of government to science has developed “much better than we had any right to expect,” Price said last week.

He sees two weak points:

- Heavy government backing of research has overbalanced the scales in universities to the detriment of education. He suggests that every professor on the staff be required to “carry his share of the teaching load” instead of some devoting themselves entirely to research.

- Congress and the technological bureaucrats drive ahead with “hard” science without considering the social costs. Some of the effort being expended on atomic energy, space, and health might well be devoted to such problems as pollution, transportation, urban problems, and other overdue, more humanly-oriented fields. (Here Price strongly backs the agenda of the Daddario Subcommittee of the House, to which he is a consultant.)

Back in 1936, in Washington, Dean Price married Margaret Helen Gailbreath. They have two children, son Don, who is finishing his doctoral work in Russian influence on Chinese policy before the Boxer Rebellion, after spending two years on Taiwan. Daughter Linda is married to a paleontologist whom she met while working one summer “scrapping plaster off bones” in the basement of the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology.

Oddly enough, the director of that museum, Alfred Sherwood Romer, is the man whom Don K. Price Jr. succeeds as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.